

SANCTIFICATION THROUGH THE KOINONIA CROSS RELATIONSHIPS IN THE  
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MINISTRY AT ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
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To my Koinonia Cross relationships that brought me closer to God,

And to the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for my sins, and to my Heavenly  
Father, who made me His child.

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## ABSTRACT

I believe the primary purpose of the church is to sanctify the body of Christ to prepare the church for the return of Jesus Christ. A challenge exists in helping Christians of international student ministries go through sanctification because of the cultural tendencies that can help hide sins and promote living a double life. The intimate relationships in Christ, as defined by the Koinonia Cross model, allowed many in the international student ministry (ISM) at Antioch Baptist Church to come into the light and experience the joy and freedom that comes from our Lord Jesus Christ. This thesis-project examines the implementation of the Koinonia Cross model in ISM at Antioch Baptist Church and how the model helped transform many lives.

# CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

## CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MINISTRY

### **Introduction**

Evangelizing to international students has increasingly become an integral part of many churches and para-church organizations, resulting in the growth of international student ministry (ISM). The rising number of international students studying in the United States has allowed Christians to evangelize to people from some of the more unreached nations in the world. Twenty-five years ago, Antioch Baptist Church started its international student ministry, which grew as many became saved by the grace of God. There is an undeniable excitement in evangelizing to international students and leading them to Christ. However, real challenges lie in guiding the students to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Becoming a Christian marks the beginning of the difficult, arduous, and often painful path of becoming more like Jesus Christ. It begets the process of sanctification. Apostle Paul expounds upon this process in Philippians 2:12, "...work out your salvation with fear and trembling."<sup>1</sup> The end goal of this process of sanctification is to adopt the humility of and become like Jesus Christ, who "humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). It is the duty of the church, especially its leadership, to disciple its sheep as shepherds and lead them to and through sanctification.

However, numerous challenges hinder the church from effectively discipling international students due to the vast cultural differences between the converts and those ministering to them. My years in ISM ministering to international students from Asia have

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<sup>1</sup> All Bible translations are English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

revealed cultural patterns and behaviors. Asian cultures emphasize filial piety, image maintenance, and avoiding shame – qualities that encourage many to merely adopt the behavior expected of a good Christian. As a result, their actions are often motivated by gaining positive recognition from those in the church rather than by a genuine conviction to live for Christ. Unfortunately, it can be challenging to discern genuine from disingenuous behavior, and this lack of discernment can leave room for the development of a behavioral-based Christian life that lacks the transformation of the heart. Such behavior can produce the person 2 Timothy 3:2-5 describes – a good Christian on the outside but an unrepentant sinner on the inside.

Christ-centered, close-knit relationships in the church that overcome cultural misconceptions and barriers have proven to be the solution to help many plagued by this issue to transform. An integral part of the commitment to love someone is to help him recognize his sins. The body of Christ must also commit to embracing and restoring those who desire to leave their old, sinful ways of life. Thus, strong Christ-centered relationships are essential in the church and are paramount to helping those in the church grow in Christ. The trust developed through such Christ-centered relationships allows disciples to be fully known by those disciplining them and vice versa. Without knowing one another intimately, it is easy to dismiss hidden challenges and sins faced by the church members. Accordingly, the church could unknowingly approve or even promote a life based solely on good Christian behavior. Members of the church could also confuse themselves into believing that they are growing spiritually when the reality is otherwise. Thus, it is incumbent on the leadership of the church to ensure that those who do become Christians are given every opportunity to live as true disciples of Jesus Christ.

In 1994, Rebekah Kim introduced the Koinonia Cross model to Berkland Baptist Church as an outline of the Christ-centered relationships each Christian should experience in church.<sup>2</sup> Antioch Baptist Church has been working to live out this model, using it as the foundation of all relationships in the church and to help one another abandon a life of sin. The church has been living out these principles from its inception, but the model's formal introduction has brought even greater clarity and a deeper understanding of its purpose. In essence, the Koinonia Cross model answers the question of what the church is. It delineates the web of trusting relationships in Christ that allows for the process of sanctification to take place by providing a space for hidden sins to come to light and go through the process of cleansing described in the Scriptures.

The essence of sanctification – leaving a life of sin and becoming obedient to the commandments of God – is at the core of the Koinonia Cross model. Furthermore, sanctification and the Koinonia Cross relationships are symbiotic; intimate relationships in Christ are needed for sanctification, which, in turn, lead to closer and more trusting relationships. Ultimately, the process of sanctification allows us to grow in the knowledge of the love of God in His Son. Accordingly, the Koinonia Cross relationships have helped many in ISM at Antioch Baptist Church come into the light and experience the joy, peace, and freedom that can only come from the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. This model has endured the past twenty-five years of ISM, helping students to overcome cultural barriers and to grow in Christ as they strive to live out the model in their daily lives.

My thesis-project aims to capture how the transformation of the international student Christians at Antioch Baptist Church took place as a result of the Koinonia Cross model. The

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<sup>2</sup> Rebekah Kim, “Raising Future Leaders through Koinonia Cross Relationships at Frontier Baptist Church in Fairbanks, Alaska” (Doctor of Ministry Thesis, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2018). Berkland Baptist Church is the former name of Antioch Baptist Church.

thesis-project explains why the Koinonia Cross relationships are necessary, and how this model has led the ISM members of Antioch Baptist Church to go through sanctification. The work records an ongoing process, as sanctification is not a one-time event but involves a lifetime of experiencing freedom from sin and a striving toward the ultimate goal of becoming a pure bride of Christ in anticipation of the return of our Bridegroom Jesus Christ.

### **ISM Outreach Opportunities**

ISM's increasing popularity coincides with the increasing number of international students studying in the U.S. For years, the U.S. has consistently been the number one destination for international students pursuing post-secondary education. This trend should not be surprising as the U.S. has the greatest number of the highest ranking universities in the world.<sup>3</sup> Adding to its popularity is the desire of many international students to work in the U.S. after graduation.<sup>4</sup> Within the U.S., the Boston area, the region where Antioch Baptist Church ministers, is one of the top locations for international students, as the area has a high concentration of prestigious universities. In the academic year of 2021-2022, Massachusetts ranked third among all states in the U.S. in total number of international students with 71,026.<sup>5</sup> See Table 1. Northeastern University and Boston University ranked second and seventh at 17,836 and 11,798, respectively, for attracting the greatest number of international students

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. News & World Report, "2022-2023 Best Global Universities Ranking," October 11, 2022, accessed June 15, 2023, <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-global-universities/rankings>. Eight out of top ten and nineteen out of top twenty-five universities in the world are in the U.S.

<sup>4</sup> ICEF Monitor, "Most international students in the US want to stay after graduation but worry about getting a job," March 23, 2022, accessed July 22, 2023, <https://monitor.icef.com/2022/03/most-international-students-in-the-us-want-to-stay-after-graduation-but-worry-about-getting-a-job/>. According to ICEF Monitor, 7 out of 10 have the desire to work in the U.S. after graduation – 4 out of 10 short-term and 3 out of 10 long-term. <https://ncses.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf23300/data-tables>. 2021 data indicates 72.1% of non-U.S. citizen doctoral graduates chose to work in the U.S.

<sup>5</sup> Institute of International Education, "Fast Facts," Open Doors, November 14, 2022, accessed July 24, 2023, <https://opendoorsdata.org/annual-release/international-students/>.

among U.S. universities.<sup>6</sup> See Table 2. The next biggest enrollment of international students in the area belongs to Harvard University at 8,087, followed by MIT at 3,718.<sup>7</sup>

States	2020/21	2021/22
California	132,758	134,043
New York	106,894	113,666
Massachusetts	66,273	71,026
Texas	67,428	70,223
Illinois	44,004	46,599

Table 1. Top 5 U.S. states hosting international students.<sup>8</sup>

Academic Year 2021/22				
Rank	Institutions	City	State	Students
1	New York University	New York	NY	21,081
2	Northeastern University - Boston	Boston	MA	17,836
3	Columbia University	New York	NY	16,956
4	University of Southern California	Los Angeles	CA	15,729
5	Arizona State University - Tempe	Tempe	AZ	15,293
6	University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign	Champaign	IL	12,833
7	Boston University	Boston	MA	11,798
8	University of California - San Diego	La Jolla	CA	11,279
9	Purdue University - West Lafayette	West Lafayette	IN	11,198
10	University of California - Los Angeles	Los Angeles	CA	10,990

Table 2. Top 10 U.S. universities hosting international students.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Institute of International Education, “Leading Host Institutions,” Open Doors, November 14, 2022, accessed July 24, 2023, <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/leading-institutions/>.

<sup>7</sup> Harvard University, “Statistics,” Harvard International Office, accessed July 22, 2023, <https://www.hio.harvard.edu/statistics>. M.I.T., “General Statistics 2021-2022,” MIT International Student Office, October 20, 2021, accessed July 22, 2023, <https://iso.mit.edu/about-iso/statistics/general-statistics-2021-2022/>.

<sup>8</sup> IIE, “Fast Facts,” Open Doors.

<sup>9</sup> IIE, “Leading Host Institutions,” Open Doors.

In 1999, following a large influx of international students to the Boston area, Antioch Baptist Church joined a growing number of churches and para-church organizations in the area and started ISM. The Boston area has attracted international students for a long time, and ethnic churches have been ministering to them for years. However, a more concerted effort was made when national ISM organizations, such as International Students, Inc. (ISI), grew involved in assisting the efforts to minister to international students.<sup>10</sup> Park Street Church became one of the first churches to engage in ministering to international students from a wide range of nations, and today, the church has become most known for its ISM with its long history of ministering to international students.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the Southern Baptist Convention has sponsored a director of ISM for the Boston area, Michael Dean, and since 1998, he has been assisting numerous churches with reaching out to international students.<sup>12</sup> Thanks to all the early pioneers, there is a growing number of churches and para-church organizations in the Boston area with ISM as one of their main ministries.

Through its efforts, ISM has become the work of foreign missions in our own backyard. *Paradigm Shift* makes compelling arguments that ISM is effectively the same as foreign missions.<sup>13</sup> The workers of ISM have the opportunity to minister to a high number of foreigners, which encapsulates a similar experience to that of foreign missionaries meeting those who live overseas. Furthermore, through ISM, the workers of ISM have the opportunity to meet a high

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Dean, “International Student Ministry in Boston & New England,” New England’s Book of Acts, October 20, 2007, accessed October 7, 2022. <https://sites.google.com/a/egc.org/newenglandsbookofacts/new-england-s-book-of-acts/section-two/group-reports/international-student-ministry-in-boston--new-england>.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Dean, “International Student Ministry in Boston & New England.”

<sup>12</sup> Michael Dean, “International Student Ministry in Boston & New England.”

<sup>13</sup> Jack D. Burke, *Paradigm Shift: Why International Students Are So Strategic to Global Missions*. Contribution by Susanne Perry (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019. Kindle Edition), 77. Susanne Perry is the Baptist Chaplain of ISM at University of British Columbia and wrote chapter seven of this book, and the chapter is titled, “Struggle Between Being a Foreign Missionary Candidate and a Call to a Ministry to International Students.”

number of scholars and influential students they might not encounter otherwise.<sup>14</sup> *Paradigm Shift* also mentions the apparent cost-effectiveness of reaching out to international students in the U.S. compared to supporting missions overseas.<sup>15</sup> Elevating the importance of ISM does not mean that foreign missions should be deemphasized or are less significant. However, if the goal is to evangelize to non-Christians in foreign nations, ministering to international students accomplishes essentially the same objective.

The sheer number of international students coming to the U.S. is a God-given opportunity for evangelism. The enrollment of international students in the U.S. higher education system in the 2021-2022 academic year was 948,519, of which 763,760 were enrolled as students and 184,759 were working under OPT (Optional Practical Training).<sup>16</sup> The next highest destination, the United Kingdom, has traditionally drawn half as many international students.<sup>17</sup> With the exception of recent years, the enrollment of international students in the U.S. has been increasing for the past thirty years. See Figure 1. Peak enrollment was 1,095,299 in 2018/19.<sup>18</sup> Most likely due to the global coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the figure declined in 2019-2020 (-1.8%) and 2020/21 (-15.0%) before rebounding in 2021-2022 (+3.8%).<sup>19</sup> After completing their education, about half of the graduates remain in the U.S. on OPT, continuously adding to the total number of ISM outreach opportunities.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Burke, *Paradigm Shift*, 77.

<sup>15</sup> Burke, *Paradigm Shift*, Perry, 83.

<sup>16</sup> Institute of International Education, “Enrollment Trends,” Open Doors, November 14, 2022, accessed July 24, 2023, <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/enrollment-trends/>.

<sup>17</sup> Institute of International Education, “A Quick Look at Global Mobility Trends,” Project Atlas 2020 Release, accessed July 24, 2023, <https://iie.widen.net/s/g2bqxkwqv/project-atlas-infographics-2020>.

<sup>18</sup> IIE, “Enrollment Trends,” Open Doors.

<sup>19</sup> IIE, “Enrollment Trends,” Open Doors.

<sup>20</sup> IIE, “Enrollment Trends,” Open Doors.

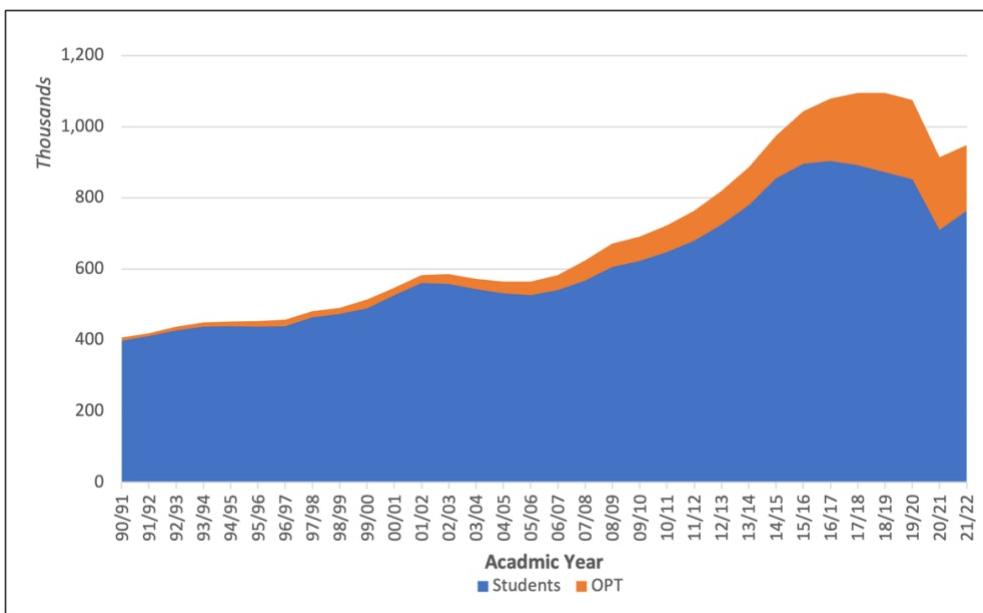


Figure 1. International students and OPT enrolled in the U.S. higher education system.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding demographics, slightly over half of all international students came from China and India in the 2021-2022 academic year.<sup>22</sup> See Figure 2. A total of 290,086 came from China, 199,182 came from India, and South Korea was a distant third at 40,755.<sup>23</sup> Since 2009-2010, China has ranked first in the country of origin for international students to the U.S., and in the last six years, about one-third of international students to the U.S. have come from China.<sup>24</sup> Subsequently, a vast majority in ISM at Antioch Baptist Church is from China, and a similar pattern is found at other churches as well. A disproportionate number of international students attending American universities coming from China and India means that a significant number of international students come from some of the least Christianized nations. In fact, looking at the

<sup>21</sup> IIE, “Enrollment Trends,” Open Doors.

<sup>22</sup> Institute of International Education, “All Places of Origin,” Open Doors, November 14, 2022, accessed July 24, 2023, <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/all-places-of-origin/>.

<sup>23</sup> IIE, “All Places of Origin,” Open Doors.

<sup>24</sup> IIE, “All Places of Origin,” Open Doors.

country-of-origin data, nearly 70% of international students come from countries whose populations are less than 10% Christian.<sup>25</sup>

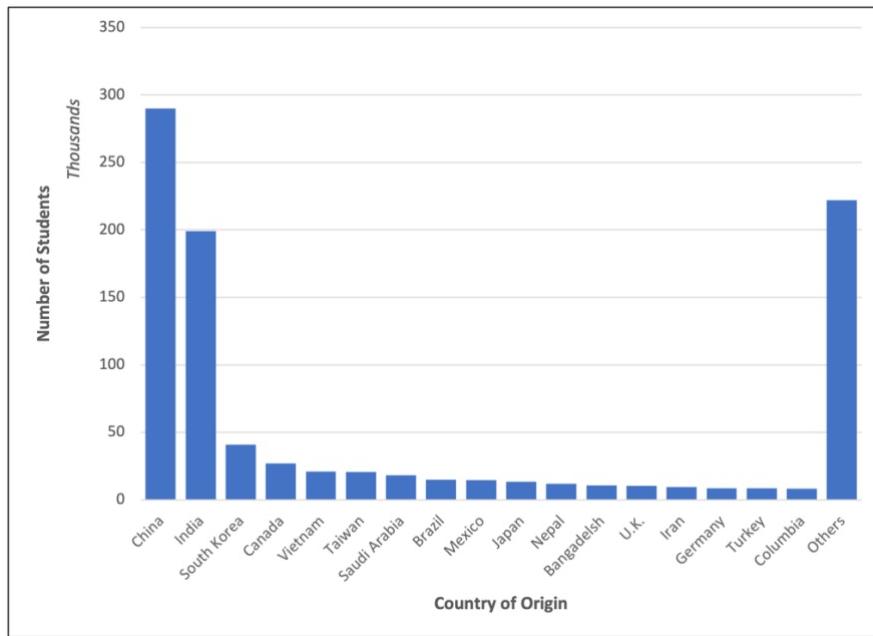


Figure 2. Country of origin for the international students in the U.S. (2021/22).<sup>26</sup>

By far, the most popular fields of study for international students in the U.S. are the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).<sup>27</sup> See Figure 3. For the academic year 2021-2022, 54% of international students were studying STEM.<sup>28</sup> In the past 20 years, STEM fields have been the fastest growing fields of study, and within STEM, 76% are studying computer science and engineering related fields.<sup>29</sup> One of the main reasons for the popularity of STEM fields is the career opportunities they lead to in the U.S. following

<sup>25</sup> World Population Review, “Most Christian Countries 2023,” accessed July 26, 2023, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/most-christian-countries>.

<sup>26</sup> IIE, “All Places of Origin”, Open Doors.

<sup>27</sup> Institute of International Education, “Field of Study,” Open Doors, November 14, 2022, accessed July 24, 2023, <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/fields-of-study>.

<sup>28</sup> IIE, “Field of Study,” Open Doors.

<sup>29</sup> IIE, “Field of Study,” Open Doors.

graduation. United States Citizenship and Immigration Services reports that in FY2021, 68.8% of H1B issued were for computer related jobs.<sup>30</sup> For effective outreach planning purposes, it is important to recognize trends among international students in their fields of study. I have observed that students gravitate toward those serving in ISM with STEM backgrounds who have advanced in careers desirable to the students.

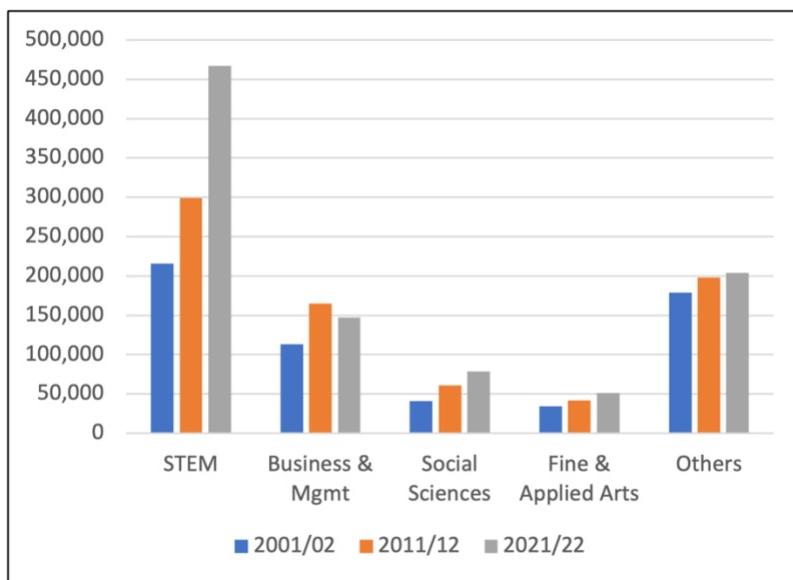


Figure 3. International student field of study trend.<sup>31</sup>

One of the challenges of ISM is the diversity of people to which the ministry evangelizes. Their decision to study in the U.S. is one of the only points in common shared by international students. International students are represented by a wide range of cultures, languages, and ages. They come as eighteen-year-old college freshmen or as research scientists well into their thirties

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Characteristic of H-1B Specialty Occupation Workers,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, March 2, 2022, accessed July 26, 2023, [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/H1B\\_Characteristics\\_Congressional\\_Report\\_FY2021-3.2.22.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/H1B_Characteristics_Congressional_Report_FY2021-3.2.22.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> IIE, “Field of Study,” Open Doors.

and married with children. All those serving in ISM must understand thoroughly the challenges associated with evangelizing to such a large age range.

Thus, ISM at Antioch Baptist Church ministers exclusively to post-undergraduate international students. Of all the international students in the U.S. over the past ten years, nearly two-thirds have been post-undergraduates.<sup>32</sup> The most recent data, as displayed in Table 3, shows that in the academic year 2021/22, 36.3% of the international students were undergraduates, and 63.7% were post-undergraduates. Unsurprisingly, most undergraduate international students prefer to fellowship with other college students. Accordingly, the undergraduate international students who come to Antioch Baptist Church are ministered to by its College Department.

Academic Level	Students	%
Undergrads	344,532	36.3%
Master's	215,076	22.7%
Doctoral	135,530	14.3%
Professional	13,582	1.4%
Graduate, Unspecified	20,909	2.2%
Non-Degree	34,131	3.6%
Optional Practical Training	184,739	19.5%
Total International Students	948,519	100.0%

Table 3. Academic level of international students studying in the U.S. (2021/22).<sup>33</sup>

Amongst international graduate students, not all respond the same to ISM. From my experience, international students in different levels of degree of study require different outreach approaches. Compared to Ph.D. students, understandably, master's degree students are far more

<sup>32</sup> Institute of International Education, “Academic Level,” Open Doors, November 14, 2022, accessed July 24, 2023, <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/academic-level/>.

<sup>33</sup> IIE, “Academic Level,” Open Doors.

opportunistic and concerned primarily with completing courses successfully, finding a job, or applying to Ph.D. programs. They are more myopic in their planning and have short-term objectives as their programs usually last only one or two years. Their interests in the Bible can thus oftentimes coincide with the level of practical help they can receive from the church. As a result, a major part of our outreach efforts has involved providing practical help to master's degree or Ph.D. students, and many of these connections have allowed friendships to form that have opened the doors for the Gospel.

If past trends are of any indication, the U.S. can continue to expect a growing number of international students despite the recent anomaly caused by the global coronavirus pandemic. Nevertheless, despite the exciting opportunities for ISM provided by the high number of international students anticipated, many challenges lie ahead. The Chinese government continues to strongly discourage its citizens from engaging in Christianity or other religions. The pervasiveness of cults in Korea drives many Korean students away from organized religions, especially Christianity. Unlike in years past, international students today are far better prepared for life in the U.S.; they have less need for connections that can provide practical help. Through social media, they arrive already well-connected with those who can help them settle down in the U.S. Additionally, most can speak English with fluency and are closely familiar with American culture. Thus, international students arrive increasingly well-connected, well-equipped, and well-off.

Even still, reaching out to smaller numbers of international students has borne positive outcomes. In years past, it was difficult to minister to each student with proper care and attention due to the overwhelming number of students that would come to our events and our limited number of staff. Furthermore, the large numbers meant that there were more students who were

not genuinely interested in the Gospel. Now, the fewer international students who attend our events seem more interested in learning about God, and we can better minister to them while providing more individual attention. Without a doubt, God will continue to open the doors for international students to become saved through ISM throughout the U.S.

### **ISM at Antioch Baptist Church**

In September 1997, Antioch Baptist Church planned an outreach event to attract new, incoming graduate students. Although we expected the event to attract primarily Asian-American students, more than fifty Chinese international graduate students from the Boston area came for free food and to socialize. Of those who came to the event, about ten students joined the Bible study that we began for them. When some began to respond to the Gospel, it became abundantly clear that God was working in the midst of us.

Rebekah Kim, who founded Antioch Baptist Church with her husband, Paul Kim, sensed God's calling to begin ISM at our church. I still vividly remember the staff meeting during which Rebekah Kim made this decision and shared her dream of becoming a missionary to China and burying her bones there. God had led her on a different path after her marriage with Paul Kim, as they founded Berkland Baptist Church on March 1, 1981, near the University of California, Berkeley. Ten years later, they left a thriving ministry in Berkeley and moved to Boston to begin Berkland Baptist Church-Boston, which later became Antioch Baptist Church. I recall Rebekah Kim's sharing about how God honored her prayer to be a missionary to China by bringing the Chinese people to our church.

ISM at Antioch Baptist Church began on Friday, January 1, 1999, with the Koinonia Cross model as its foundation. Sam Kang and his wife, Christine, were its founding directors,

and my wife, Lydia, and I were staff members of this newly founded ministry. Most joining this new ministry had been international students themselves. Sam Kang grew up in Korea, Thailand, and Japan before entering the University of California, Berkeley, as an international student. Lydia arrived in the U.S. as an international graduate student to attend Cornell University and later Harvard University. Nearly two years after the start of this ministry, Sam and Christine Kang left for missions overseas, and in September 2000, Lydia and I became its new directors.

Many challenges and unknowns confronted the early years of ISM; so much was lost in translation. Reaching out to those who differed in both language and culture required much adjustment and adaptation. However, from the very beginning of the ministry, its emphasis on teaching the Word of God without compromise was not lost. There was no attempt to water down the Gospel in order to render it more palatable to first-time hearers. This commitment to Christ and His Word, along with their concrete efforts to love one another, allowed the brothers and sisters in the church to bring the Word of God to life in their own lives; the invisible God was made manifest in the lives of Christians in the church. As a result, seekers could sense the family of God, and this abstract concept became tangible. Many international students who came to Antioch Baptist Church through ISM confessed that the relationships they witnessed in the church could not be possible by human effort alone.

Still, our attempts to share the love of God by teaching the Gospel and serving the students could not ignite in most a pure interest in God; they were merely curious, at best. Predominantly from China, the international students who came to church were in much need of assistance in settling down as they were limited in both their English and finances - unlike international students today. Many formed connections with us to seek practical help and disappeared once their needs were met.

Yet, as in the Gospels, those who found themselves in need of Jesus were saved and eventually became core members of Antioch Baptist Church. When God began adding to our numbers, a single Bible study grew into Bible studies at each of the major universities in the Boston area. The staff of ISM today were all once international students who came to Antioch Baptist Church as non-Christians. They are now leaders who teach the Bible and serve alongside Lydia and me as co-workers in Christ. As former international students, they are best suited to minister to those reminiscent of themselves, and some have even moved from Boston to serve as missionaries.

By the grace of God, ISM at Antioch Baptist Church has been a fruitful ministry thus far, but the work of ministry has been far from easy. Most books written about international student ministries share success stories, but there is no doubt a far greater number of stories of difficulties and heartaches. The greatest challenge in this ministry has been discipling those committed to Christ and guiding them to experience sanctification; leading an international student to Christ has proven relatively easier. The true fruit of ISM at Antioch Baptist Church has not been the number of salvations, though there have been many, but the transforming work of God in the lives of those who choose to surrender themselves to Christ daily. Reflecting upon the past has revealed to me that such transformation of souls was made possible because of the love of God that became visible and real through those who committed themselves to loving their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Koinonia Cross model delineates the relationships we live out as members of the church. In essence, this model provides the image of the church explained in the Scriptures. The command to love one another, which outlines love as the highest law, is the Koinonia Cross model in practice. And this model explains what I have experienced at Antioch Baptist Church

since I first stepped into the church. My prayer has been for those God has placed in my life to experience the same relationships and love I have experienced. This thesis-project is an attempt to testify to God's work in my life and in the lives of the international students who came to this family of God.

### **Challenges in ISM at Antioch Baptist Church**

The many salvations in the early years of ISM at Antioch Baptist Church brought much excitement to all those serving in the ministry. Many new believers realized their sinfulness and professed faith in Jesus Christ, as the Word of God revealed to them their sins. However, despite their commitments to living new lives in Christ, even those who had been Christians for years struggled to live out their professions of faith and returned to living as they had before becoming Christians. This issue, for some, brought into question the genuineness of their salvation, but it proved with certainty for all that salvation was only the beginning of a lifetime of transformation; they required sanctification.

The challenges of Christian life beget struggle, and struggling is often evidence of growth. However, many in ISM avoided struggling while still displaying behaviors typical of a Christian – it was, in a way, too good to be true faith! They appeared obedient to the Word of God, polite, gentle, generous, and willing to volunteer and serve. However, their motivations to act in such a way lay in factors other than the love of God; they built their houses on sand rather than on the foundation of the Word of God (Matthew 7:24-27). When the pressures of life, along with its temptations, came to bear, their houses crumbled. Their levels of faith did not accord with the good Christian behavior they demonstrated.

These circumstances can describe many Christians, but this problem was particularly prevalent amongst those in ISM at Antioch Baptist Church. Their motivations came largely from their desires to gain recognition as good Christians and avoid reproof. It soon became evident that these desires were largely influenced by the values upheld by the Asian cultures imbued in the backgrounds of the ISM members. These values are explicated in detail in Chapter 3, and they include the desire to save face and to avoid shame. The desire to behave righteously while hiding sin became commonplace and many in ISM worked to foster an image of perfect Christian faith rather than the righteousness of God through the repentance of sins.

Nevertheless, no matter their backgrounds, all sinners share one thing in common. All sinners hate the light and desire to hide in the darkness (John 3:19-20). It is tempting for one to appear as a faithful Christian by doing all that is expected of them by others in the church while living a double life. The shame of exposed sins, along with the embarrassment of not appearing as a faithful Christian, become the motivation for living this double life. Thus, sinners utilize creativity and deception to hide sins and choose to put on the behavior of a good Christian in order to avoid such shame. A lack of discernment allows sinners to continue such a lifestyle under a Christian mask while their hearts remain essentially unchanged.

There is even further consequence when this double life leads to self-righteousness. Acting like a good Christian can lead to an unfounded belief in one's own righteousness. Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees whitewashed tombs for appearing outwardly righteous while full of uncleanness inside (Matthew 23:27). Perfecting one's outside behavior without genuine transformation of the heart preserves one's ego and encourages self-righteousness. Apostle Paul described such Christians encountered by Timothy – “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5). Furthermore, it is difficult for those who have merely the

appearance of godliness to be sanctified without fellow Christians who commit to love, know, and encourage them to be spiritually cleansed.

Thus, growing in Christ is far more difficult than becoming a Christian; sanctification is a continual process that requires much discipline and effort. The Koinonia Cross model plays an integral role in revealing the pride that motivates one to save face and avoid shame. The relationships outlined by the model not only help bring sins to light but also provide a loving and safe environment for restoration from sin. Intimate Christ-centered relationships can help us view repentance from sin as a victory rather than as shame and defeat. Despite our best intentions and efforts, our pride prevents us from going through sanctification alone as we attempt to hide the shameful aspects of our lives. The absolute commitment to love one another in the church, which the Koinonia Cross model represents, is at the heart of a church that seeks to help sanctify the members of the church.

The makeup of the body of each ministry poses different sets of challenges. ISM faces unique challenges based on the ethnic and cultural groups of those in the ministry. In ISM at Antioch Baptist Church, I discovered that cultural background strongly influences a person's understanding of God and Christian life; it has been particularly challenging for those from China. Family background, cultures, and ideologies, such as communism, will shape and mold thoughts and behavior. As I learned what hinders those in ISM from growing in Christ, I have come to sympathize and empathize with them. It is the responsibility of the church, especially its leadership, to know and understand in detail the characteristics that prevent anyone from being drawn to God.

The following chapters explain how the Koinonia Cross model has served as the foundation for living out the Word of God at Antioch Baptist Church, and the Word of God

commands us to love one another. In answering the question about the greatest commandment, Jesus said to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). Helping one another grow closer to God is the best way of loving one another as Christians.

The Koinonia Cross model has been an essential part of Christian life for the ISM members of Antioch Baptist Church. Loving one another, as defined by the model, has brought many to come into the light to experience sanctification from hiding in the darkness. I wrote this thesis-project because I believe the Koinonia Cross model represents the biblical understanding of life in the church. Naturally, a biblical church must be where sanctification takes place. This thesis-project includes personal testimonies, which are examples of lives bearing the Koinonia Cross relationships in ISM at Antioch Baptist Church. They depict how the relationships in Christ described by the Koinonia Cross model have helped the members of ISM grow closer to Christ.

## CHAPTER 2: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

### DISCIPLESHIP OF ISM MEMBERS OF ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH

#### **Introduction**

What is the purpose of the church? The answer to this question lies at the crux of how we live as Christians. I believe the purpose of the church is the sanctification of the body of Christ. Though the church is used by God for a wide range of His work, all that takes place in the church can be considered as the means to the end goal, which is sanctification. Sanctification is not only for the sake of our righteousness but also to prepare us for the return of Jesus Christ. The church's role is to prepare the body of Christ for the most significant event left in history, our Lord's return, by helping the members become pure and holy through sanctification. The holiness of every Christian is God's commandment and will.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, life in the church should bring about the cleansing of the sins of its members, and the body of Christ must make a collective effort to become holy. Just as Christians are called to be holy, so must the church be holy. According to Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:16, the church is called the temple of God because it is the dwelling place of God's Spirit.<sup>2</sup> The church should be cleansed from defilement and serve as a place for a spiritual battle against sin. Holiness should be the pursuit of every church.

However, this pursuit of holiness, or sanctification, cannot occur without love. When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he told them to wash one another's feet as a command to

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 1:16 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistles to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 146.

help one another be cleansed, referring to sanctification (John 13:10, 14).<sup>3</sup> Jesus also commanded his disciples to love one another (John 13:34), which Apostle John later reemphasized in 1 John 4:7-8. This love must include helping one another become holy. The relationships that the members form with one another in the church are essential because loving and caring relationships are required to help one another go through the difficult process of sanctification.

Chapter 2 explains the role that these relationships in the church have played in the sanctification of the ISM members of Antioch Baptist Church. I will define the purpose of the church and how the church has the responsibility to purify the body of Christ. In particular, I will describe how the Koinonia Cross model was essential in the sanctification of the ISM members. This chapter also includes my personal experience with the Koinonia Cross model and how it has impacted my Christian life.

### **The Purpose of the Church: The Sanctification of the Body of Christ**

#### **Church and Sanctification**

In Ephesians 5:22-33, Apostle Paul uses marriage as a metaphor to describe the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church. He draws a parallel between the relationship between a husband and wife and the relationship between Jesus, the bridegroom, and the church as his bride; the responsibility of the husband is compared to that of Christ. Apostle Paul compared the two sets of relationships to teach the Ephesian church that God's original intention of instituting marriage in Genesis 2 was to help them recognize who Jesus is to the church. This parallel must be why Apostle Paul wrote that "this mystery is profound" (Ephesians 5:32).

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 154.

In this text, Apostle Paul stated that Jesus gave himself up for the church “that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word” (Ephesians 5:25-27). Jesus Christ did not die on the cross only for the salvation of sinners, but he also died to cleanse or sanctify the church. In his letter to Titus, Apostle Paul reiterated the critical point that Jesus Christ was he “who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). God’s clear objective has always been to not only save us but also to make us holy. The children of God have been chosen before the foundation of the world “to be holy and blameless” (Ephesians 1:4).

There are different interpretations regarding “the washing of water” in Ephesians 5:26. Some understand Apostle Paul as making a comparison to the baptism of the bride, which was the cleansing bath for the bride before she was presented to the bridegroom.<sup>4</sup> Another interpretation is that Apostle Paul was using water as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit because, just as water is used for cleansing, the Holy Spirit is doing the work of cleansing from sin by using the word to accomplish inward cleansing.<sup>5</sup> The second interpretation is more likely because cleansing cannot be a one-time event but is required continuously since all Christians sin, and Christians need to work repeatedly toward becoming holy and without blemish. As Ephesians 6:17 states, it is the preached Word of the Gospel that the Spirit uses as a sword to destroy sin and the work of the evil one.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of cleansing is so that Jesus Christ “might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish”

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<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 387.

<sup>5</sup> John D. Barry, Douglas Mangum, Derek R. Brown, Michael S. Heiser, *NIV, Faithlife Study Bible: Intriguing Insights to Inform Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 1946. Ezekiel 36:25: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.”

<sup>6</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians, Volume 42* (Dallas, Texas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 376.

(Ephesians 5:27). The church is cleansed by the power of the Holy Spirit working in the teaching of the word. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of the church, with Jesus exercising his authority as the head of the church through the Word of God, to help the members of the church become cleansed. The sanctification of the church occurs by the work of the Holy Spirit and the teaching of the word and the members living out the teaching (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). The Word of God is intended for the work of cleansing. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Also, Apostle Peter made a similar note, stating that obedience to the truth does the work of purifying your soul (1 Peter 1:22).

It is important to note that Christian life is described as the state of sanctification.<sup>7</sup> The duty of all Christians, from the moment of salvation until the end of life, is to make every effort to be transformed and become like Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> On the basis of the New Testament, salvation has a sequential reference in salvation past, present, and future.<sup>9</sup> And these three references are often described as justification, sanctification, and glorification.<sup>10</sup> Salvation begins with justification, and from there, the process of sanctification begins immediately. Sanctification will only end at the end of our earthly life, whence glorification occurs.

Justification takes place when one is saved from the penalty of sin and is redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross (Romans 5:9). This stage describes the very moment of salvation. Salvation is a gift of God because it is not earned by one's own doing but by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8). Sanctification is abandoning the practice of sin, and this stage describes the transformation of becoming holy by the work of God that takes place during the entirety of

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<sup>7</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 99 and Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology, Second Edition: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 1058.

<sup>8</sup> Romans 8:29, 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 11:1, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 5:1-2, and 1 John 2:6.

<sup>9</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011), 318.

<sup>10</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 84.

the Christian life. When sin entered the world through the first man, the image of God that Jesus had revealed to all humanity was lost in humans (Romans 5:12). Thus, the sanctification stage must bring all Christians closer to the figure that Christ was on the earth and the image of God at the time of creation. From sanctification follows glorification, which is freedom from the presence of sin. It is the fulfillment of the promise of the resurrection when the bodies of the believers will transform to be like Jesus' glorious body (Philippians 3:21).

The moment of salvation is only the beginning of the Christian journey. As J. C. Ryle mentions in *Holiness*, “he who thinks Jesus died and rose again for justification only has much to learn, and he is dishonoring Jesus by making him a half a Savior.”<sup>11</sup> From my ministry experience and spiritual struggles, I have found that the sanctification stage is far more difficult and challenging than becoming a Christian. The old nature of Christians remains even after salvation.<sup>12</sup> It is no wonder that a large portion of the epistles in the New Testament are exhortations and admonitions for temptations and sins to Christians. After all, Apostle Paul warned the Philippian church to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). Since Christian life is synonymous with the process of sanctification, the responsibility should fall on the church for the cleansing of the body of Christ.

### Relationships and Sanctification

Sanctification requires tremendous effort, and it is not easy for an individual to go through it alone. Pain and shame often hinder the difficult effort of persevering during the sanctification process. As a result, the collective effort of the body of Christ is often required to

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<sup>11</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: For the Will of God is Your Sanctification – I Thessalonians 4:3*. Edited by Miller, P. (Abbotsford, WI: Aneko Press, 2019), 44.

<sup>12</sup> Ralph W. Neighbour, *Survival Kit for New Christians* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 2015), 40.

help one another be cleansed; relationships with fellow members of the church are imperative for the sanctification process. The church must create a safe and loving environment for its members to go through repentance and restoration.

The strength of the relationships within the church can serve to measure the progression of sanctification. 1 John 1:5-9 indicates that the depth of our relationship with God is related to how close the relationships we have with one another are. “But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Thus, walking in the light brings us into fellowship with one another.<sup>13</sup> Roy Hessian states that “the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross was not only to bring men back into fellowship with God but also into fellowship with their fellow men.”<sup>14</sup> To walk in the light is to come into the sphere where God is to be found, which is the antithesis of walking in the darkness.<sup>15</sup> Closeness to God and one another through walking in the light will bring about a life that leads to cleansing from all sin. Regarding this cleansing, John speaks not of past justification but of present sanctification; the word *cleanse* in 1 John 1:7 is present tense in Greek.<sup>16</sup>

The antithesis of walking in the light is best described by John 3:19-20, which explains how people loved the darkness out of fear that their sinful works and sins would be exposed by the light. Thus, fellowship with one another is a precondition of walking in the light. Accordingly, our relationships in the church reveal our commitment to God, and these relationships are often the mirrors God uses to help us see our sins. They also provide the godly

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<sup>13</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 111.

<sup>14</sup> Roy Hession, *The Calvary Road* (Somerset, United Kingdom: The Roy Hession Book Trust, 1950), 9.

<sup>15</sup> I. Howard Marshall, NICNT: The Epistles of John, 111.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Jamieson, A.R. Faucet, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, 526.

love needed for repentance and restoration. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The word ‘fellowship’ in 1 John 1:7 is a special word in that it describes the depth of our relationships with fellow believers. In Greek, fellowship is *κοινωνία*, and it denotes the full togetherness established by a common faith in Christ. Additionally, the word coming from *κοινωνία* implies it is a relationship that shares things with one another.<sup>17</sup> An example of this implication of the word lies in Acts 2:42-47, where the first church members not only devoted themselves to the apostles’ teachings but also shared their possessions with those in need. Nowadays, the word fellowship has come to take on the meaning of spending time together and enjoying one another’s companionship. However, the Greek translation of the word *κοινωνία* means that we must also strive to love one another as Christ has loved us (John 13:34). It is from this word that we have the Koinonia Cross.

The relationships we ought to have in the church are defined by the word *κοινωνία*, and these relationships are upheld by the knowledge that the forgiveness of God is ever-present. The knowledge that we are forgiven sinners aids us in understanding how repentance leads to victory in overcoming the darkness. Each member’s identity as a forgiven sinner is what makes the relationships in the church special, as it allows for an environment of humility and grace to grow. When the confession of sins takes place in such an environment - or the process of walking in the light - restoration can follow and help us experience the grace and truth of God. In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer strongly advocates confessing one’s sin before another Christian because it removes the last stronghold of self-justification and makes sin lose all its power.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Hauck, “*Kοινός*, *Κοινωνός*, *Κοινωνέω*, *Κοινωνία*, *Συγκοινωνός*, *Συγκοινωνέω*, *Κοινωνικός*, *Κοινόω*,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 808.

<sup>18</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 1978), 89.

Apostle James wrote, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16). “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Salvation is merely the beginning of a lifetime of cleansing or sanctification, and the Lord’s discipline is for those He loves and “every son whom He receives” (Hebrews 12:6). God’s effort to sanctify His children through discipline is a sure sign of belonging to Him. In the same light, A. W. Tozer wrote in *Discipleship* that “if we are truly sons and daughters by faith, we will respond to the wise discipline and the necessary rebukes aimed at bringing us to the full measure of spiritual stature.”<sup>19</sup> And the sanctified soul will be the most prepared for and anticipating the return of Jesus Christ. “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

### **Becoming Holy and Without Blemish**

In order to know whether a Christian is progressing in sanctification, there must be a clear understanding of the end goal. What does it mean to be sanctified? The obvious answer is to become like Jesus by imitating him.<sup>20</sup> In the history of the world, there was only one person who perfectly obeyed God, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and he is whom we ought to imitate. The summary of Jesus' life on the earth is one of absolute obedience to his Father. Thus, to become like Jesus is to obey every command of God as Jesus described what a disciple must do in Matthew 28:19-20, “Go … and make disciples … teaching them to observe all that I have

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<sup>19</sup> A. W. Tozer, *Discipleship: What It Truly Means to Be a Christian--Collected Insights from A. W. Tozer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018), 79.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1, Ephesians 5:1, and 1 John 2:6.

commanded you.”<sup>21</sup> A perfectly holy person who is without blemish would be someone who observes the Word of God. And obeying the Word of God cannot be achieved by sheer willpower and is practically impossible without the transformation of the heart. Thus, sanctification can be defined as the transformation of the heart so that we can become a person who willingly and wholeheartedly obeys the Word of God.

Such transformation also requires humility because only the humble will recognize the depravity of the human heart and the need for God. Humility is the very nature of God. Jesus said of himself that he is “gentle and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29). Because of his humility, Jesus willfully obeyed the Father in heaven. “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). In describing his utter brokenness, Apostle Paul challenged the church in Philippi to strive to be the same. Andrew Murray, in *Humility*, stated that the evidence of holiness is in “the increasing humility it produces.”<sup>22</sup> Humility is the proof of holiness. And he summarized humility in the following manner.

Humility, the place of entire dependence on God, is, from the very nature of things, the first duty and the highest virtue of the creature, and the root of every virtue. And so pride, or the loss of this humility, is the root of every sin and evil.<sup>23</sup>

In the Gospels, Jesus taught that there was no character more important than humility. When the disciples asked Jesus who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 18:1-6, Jesus responded with a completely unexpected answer. He said to them in Matthew 18:3-4, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

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<sup>21</sup> Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 14.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Murray, *Humility: The Path to Holiness* (Morgantown, KY: Tole Publishing, Kindle Edition, 2018), 53.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Murray, *Humility*, 2-3.

The greatest attribute or character of a person is humility because the one who is the most humble is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 18:5, Jesus adds, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.” He is referring to the fact that he is humble, like a child. Sadly, the disciples exemplified the opposite of humility as each wanted to be the greatest, fully exercising their ego.

Holiness and humility are congruous because only “a holy person will seek humility.”<sup>24</sup>

In Romans 6, Apostle Paul used the phrase “died with Christ” to describe the new life the believer has in Christ. A Christian is someone who has died and has no will of his own; he no longer lives for himself, but “the life he lives he lives to God” (Romans 6:10). In essence, dying to the self in Christ, which is the process of becoming humble, is sanctification.

In Galatians 2:20, Apostle Paul explains that he was crucified with Christ; he no longer had any will of his own, but his sole desire was to fulfill the will of Christ. He no longer relied on himself, which was his own flesh, but he lived by the faith of Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup> Placing complete trust in Jesus Christ, he lived a life of complete dependence on God. Becoming humble is the will of God and what God desires for each of us. There is perhaps no greater example than in 2 Corinthians 12:5-10, which reveals God’s desire for our humility. Although Apostle Paul was one of the most faithful servants of God in his generation and tasked with a great mission, God would not remove the thorn in his flesh that harassed him to keep him from becoming conceited (2 Corinthians 12:7). God was more concerned about Apostle Paul’s humility than his ministry despite the fact that the thorn in the flesh added to the suffering he had to endure while serving God.

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<sup>24</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Though most translations state, “I live by the faith in the Son of God,” I agree with KJV, which states, “I live by the faith of the Son of God.”

Even though the Scriptures define humility with absolute clarity and with copious examples, there is a lack of understanding regarding how humility must be lived out in one's everyday life. This is where the relationships in Christ come in. Andrew Murray wrote in *Humility* that "humility towards men will be the only sufficient proof that our humility before God is real."<sup>26</sup> Humility is not a virtue that can be lived out in isolation. Only in our relationship with one another can humility be made manifest and practiced. Andrew Murray also added in his book that "our humility before God has no value, but as it prepares us to reveal the humility of Jesus to our fellow men."<sup>27</sup> The true condition of our humility will remain hidden until we are immersed in following the command of Jesus to love one another.

In Luke 9:46-48, which holds the same story as Matthew 18:1-6, Jesus tells his disciples that "he who is least among you all is the one who is great" (Luke 9:48). This instruction is not only the call to display humility in a general sense, but to be humble towards one another. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus prays for his disciples and then for those who will believe in him, "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). Unity among believers, which is impossible without humility, is how the world will know that God sent His Son into this world. Only in Christ-centered relationships can believers learn how to be humble and come close to attaining God's desired unity among His children.

Thus, we need the body of Christ to be broken. In our effort to love one another and become one as Jesus commanded, every ounce of pride in us should surface. Ideally, self-realization would always beget humility. Yet, becoming broken is not easy because the ego always resists facing the shame of repenting for sin. The ensuing temptation to hide and justify

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<sup>26</sup> Andrew Murray, *Humility*, 43.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Murray, *Humility*, 46.

our sins makes it extremely difficult, or even impossible, to go through the process of sanctification alone. When pride becomes visible, the body of Christ helps us see our sins and go through repentance and restoration. As 1 John 1:7 states, walking in the light leads to having “fellowship with one another.”

Sanctification and relationships in Christ are symbiotic, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Relationships allow sanctification to take place, and relationships are also the result of sanctification. Similarly, the Koinonia Cross can be viewed as the means by which we go through sanctification, and a healthy Koinonia Cross is the fruit of sanctification. The church, which is the very dwelling place of God’s Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16), is where the cleansing of sin must take place, and the cleansing of sin bears loving relationships that produce unity.

### **The Koinonia Cross Model**

The Koinonia Cross model describes the relationships Christians share in the church. It demonstrates the theological significance of the spiritual relationships experienced by the body of Christ. This model was introduced by Rebekah Kim in 1994 and was the subject of her Doctor of Ministry thesis at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary.<sup>28</sup> Since its introduction, the Koinonia Cross model has become the standard that the members of Antioch Baptist Church have been striving to work towards. The biblical relationships, or *koinonia*, in the church, are comprised of four types, as shown in Figure 4. “When these four kinds of relationships are properly oriented and surrendered to God, a fertile soil for an abundant Christian life as well as a Christ-centered church can emerge.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Rebekah Kim, “Raising Future Leaders through Koinonia Cross Relationships at Frontier Baptist Church in Fairbanks, Alaska” (Doctor of Ministry Thesis, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2018).

<sup>29</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 30.

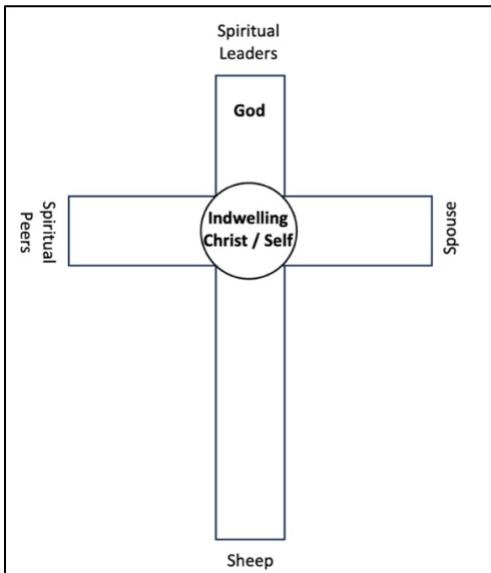


Figure 4. The Koinonia Cross Diagram.<sup>30</sup>

From the inception of the church in 1981, those who came to Berkland Baptist Church were taught that members of the church formed a family because everyone is bound by the blood of Jesus Christ; thus, a church is the family of God. What distinguishes Christians, or for that matter, the church, from the rest of the world is obedience to the teachings of Jesus, and this obedience is highlighted by love for one another. Jesus emphasizes this love for one another in John 13:34-35, stating that this is the very evidence of being his disciples. This common purpose and vision form the family of God that brings about a commitment to one another created by an inseparable bond. When the Koinonia Cross model was introduced, it gave clarity and greater theological meaning to the concept of the family of God.

Applying the Koinonia Cross model to the sanctification of the ISM members is the main crux of this thesis-project, so I will explain this model in detail. This section will summarize the

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<sup>30</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 31.

Koinonia Cross model described in Chapter 2 of Rebekah Kim's thesis. The foundation of "the Koinonia Cross is our relationship with God and the Indwelling Christ."<sup>31</sup> As shown in Figure 4, the four kinds of relationships are spiritual leaders, spiritual peers, spouse, and sheep. Ideally, all sides of the Koinonia Cross relationships should be abundant and balanced, and an imbalance can signal spiritual problems.<sup>32</sup>

In her thesis, she cited relationships found in the Bible as examples or models for each of the four kinds of relationships of the Koinonia Cross. She used 1 Corinthians 4:15-17 to highlight Paul's qualifications as a spiritual leader. Viewing himself as more than a leader, Apostle Paul called himself a spiritual father and confessed to the Corinthian church that "I became your father in Christ through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:15).<sup>33</sup> He considered his sheep Timothy like his own child, calling him, "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord" and spiritually raised Timothy as a leader worthy to represent him to the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 4:17).<sup>34</sup> As exemplified by Paul, the responsibility of a spiritual leader is to teach and show who God is, and lead the sheep closer to God, who is our Chief Shepherd. The spiritual leader must teach with the Word of God and demonstrate the life of sacrifice and suffering.

In their peer relationship, David and Jonathan exemplified a selfless, God-fearing friendship.<sup>35</sup> "Jonathan loved him (David) as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1), even though he had every reason to be jealous of David, as God chose David to be the next king of Israel rather than himself, who was the heir of the throne as the son of King Saul.<sup>36</sup> Yet, Jonathan's friendship with David never wavered, and he cared for him according to the will of God. David, on his part,

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<sup>31</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 31-32.

<sup>33</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 37-38.

<sup>34</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 37-38.

<sup>35</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 38-39.

<sup>36</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 38-39.

honored Jonathan until the end by caring for the last living son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9). Their special friendship could be formed, and they honored one another because of God. Jonathan honored David because David was chosen by God. David honored Jonathan until the end because Jonathan was the son of God's anointed king in Saul.

In regard to spouse, the marriage relationship between Isaac and Rebekah provides a biblical model of marriage.<sup>37</sup> Isaac loved Rebekah, and Rebekah was a suitable helper to Isaac throughout their marriage.<sup>38</sup> When Isaac's mother, Sarah, passed away, Rebekah comforted him, and in their latter years, she willingly took on the curse of Jacob and helped Jacob receive blessings from Isaac to help fulfill the prophecy that "the older shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23).<sup>39</sup> Rebekah became a spiritual helper to Isaac when he lost discernment due to the effects of his old age.

An excellent biblical example of a sheep relationship is Ruth's relationship with Naomi.<sup>40</sup> As a widow, Naomi had nothing to offer, yet when she asked her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, to return to their homeland, Orpah left while Ruth followed Naomi because of God.<sup>41</sup> Ruth told Naomi, "For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). Ruth desired to have the God of Israel as her God and belong to God's chosen people; her reason for following Naomi was God. Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi because of God should be a model for a sheep's motivation to develop a deep relationship with one's shepherd.

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<sup>37</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 39.

<sup>38</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 39-40.

<sup>39</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 40.

<sup>40</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 41-42.

<sup>41</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 41-42.

To assess our Koinonia Cross relationships, Rebekah Kim instructs us to draw concentric circles on the Koinonia Cross diagram, and for each of the four sides, the names should be placed with the closest relationships in the innermost circle.<sup>42</sup> The Koinonia Cross relationships are one's "self-portrait" or a "spiritual inventory."<sup>43</sup> Thus, the Koinonia Cross reflects one's relationship with God. As J. C. Ryle emphasizes, for spiritual growth, we must be cautious of "the company we keep and the friendships we form" because "nothing perhaps affects man's character more than the company he keeps."<sup>44</sup> The company we keep certainly reveals the desires of the heart. Anyone genuinely passionate about God should seek to form a healthy Koinonia Cross.

If any of the sides of the Koinonia Cross is lacking, it could be a sign of spiritual weakness.<sup>45</sup> Missing a spiritual leader could indicate a disinclination to be under authority due to an issue of pride. Missing sheep could indicate an unwillingness to share the love of God, which could be a sign of selfishness. The lack of a healthy relationship with peers could indicate competition or inaccessibility. The Koinonia Cross model provides a spiritual inventory of each believer and honestly assesses one's desire for growth. The model helps clarify how we understand our relationship with God, which can seem vague and confusing. In a way, the Koinonia Cross is the data we need to measure our progress.

The process of perfecting the Koinonia Cross serves as an instrument for sanctification. Using the model, individuals can assess the strengths and weaknesses of his relationship with God. The strengths and weaknesses of our Koinonia Cross become visible to others because our relationships, or the lack of them, are observable. After all, it is sin that caused the broken

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<sup>42</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 42-43.

<sup>43</sup> Rebekah Kim, *Koinonia Cross*, 43.

<sup>44</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, 90.

<sup>45</sup> For the singles, the evaluation of the Koinonia Cross would not include the spouse.

relationship between God and humans, and humans with one another, in Genesis 3. Asher Intrater in *Covenant Relationships* states that the evidence of the presence of sin is the “breakdown and fracturing of relationships” and “the ultimate plan of redemption is to restore our relationships not only with God but also with each other.”<sup>46</sup> And he adds that “love is reversing of the act of fracturing.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, our relationship with one another is strong evidence of sanctification.

Building a healthy Koinonia Cross is hard work because love is very costly and requires hard work. Only when we attempt to love do we learn how much we do not, and selfishness surfaces. Naturally, the more we attempt to build a healthy Koinonia Cross, the more we discover that the command by Jesus to love one another seems impossible because we are sinners. When the Koinonia Cross relationships are healthy, individually and collectively, as a church, the love of God is made manifest through the love shared with one another. And the presence of the love of God is the most powerful witness to the perishing world, where love grows increasingly cold and absent. The world is rife with cynicism and mistrust caused by broken relationships, painful heartaches, and humanistic love, and only the genuine love of God will make the Gospel real.

## The Koinonia Cross Model in Practice

### My Personal Experience

I first learned about the Koinonia Cross model in October 1994. Rebekah Kim taught this model as the spiritual inventory of each believer. I was sitting in the back of the room listening

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<sup>46</sup> Asher Intrater, *Covenant Relationships* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2016), 17.

<sup>47</sup> Asher Intrater, *Covenant Relationship*, 89.

carefully, and this model immediately captured my attention because it allowed me to visualize what a Christian life looks like and concretely evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of my relationship with God. Towards the end of her teaching, we were given a few minutes to fill out our Koinonia Cross relationships. I did not write any names. Though I had begun to attend Antioch Baptist Church for only five months, I thought I would have several names I could write down since I had been attending churches for many years. However, I could not, in good conscience, add any according to the qualification for each side of the Koinonia Cross diagram.

I had thought of myself as a good Christian because I went to church and did not commit what I considered to be grave sins. The truth was that I never lived for God, let alone even cared to understand the meaning of the cross of Jesus Christ. My barren Koinonia Cross revealed that I was not living as a Christian. It exposed the fact that I had never tried to love anyone, especially those in church. Love requires sacrifice, and I never wanted to pay the cost necessary to love anyone. I was barely generous enough to keep my reputation as a good person. When I found out about those at Antioch Baptist Church who rejected better career opportunities and higher salaries in other states to remain at the church, I was utterly shocked. I could not deny the fact that, one way or another, following Jesus Christ required my life. Yet, I sought after the cost-free way of following Jesus, which was what Dietrich Bonhoeffer described as “cheap grace.”<sup>48</sup> The love the church members had for one another was like nothing I had witnessed before. I had a successful career, money, and many friends. Yet, before the church members, most of whom did not have as much materially as I did, they looked so rich, and I felt so poor.

Several months later, in January 1995, Rebekah Kim taught at a retreat I attended, and the message was on John 2:1-11. She referred to Jesus’ miracle of turning water into wine as a

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<sup>48</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone Books, 1995), 3.

chemical change and drew a parallel between this chemical change and the transformation that must take place in one's life after encountering Jesus. However, I never went through such a change or even tried. I had the same values as my non-Christian classmates at MIT and was no different from them. At the same time, I was different from the Christians in the church. The fact that I was not different from the non-Christians around me meant that I had not undergone a chemical change. I was never transformed, which meant that I did not know Jesus and why he died on the cross for me. At the end of the message, after being pierced in the heart by what I heard, I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ.

Since then, many names have been added to my Koinonia Cross. Paul and Rebekah Kim have become my spiritual leaders, and I often refer to them as my spiritual parents. Years ago, I was under the leadership of Daniel Im, Simon Kang, and Sam Kang, and though they are serving as overseas missionaries and far from me now, they continue to shape my Christian life and inspire me. They are also included as my spiritual leaders. Many peers have become a part of my life and are now co-workers and fellow pastors. These brothers have welcomed me into their lives and helped foster friendships that are nearly 30 years long. God provided me a spouse in Lydia with whom we have a daughter in Deborah. Lydia has been a spiritual partner who has served the Lord by my side since the first day of marriage. Over the years, many sheep have been included, as my wife and I have been serving in ISM as directors.

Each side of my Koinonia Cross has been like messengers from God to help guide my Christian life. The relationships have encouraged me during difficult times and directed me to see my sins during spiritual struggles. Without the detailed guidance of my spiritual leaders, in words and by exemplifying godly life, the arduous journey of Christian life would have been practically impossible. In the case of my sheep, when I see their lack of spiritual growth, I am

reminded of my deficiencies as a shepherd. My Koinonia Cross relationships have been a large part of all my significant milestones in life. Most of all, I take comfort in knowing that if I happen to fall, my Koinonia Cross relationships will be there to lift me up.

Until I came to Antioch Baptist Church and experienced the love of God through the family of God, specifically through the Koinonia Cross relationships, the concept of God's love was vague to me. Without clear evidence, it is hard for a skeptic like me to believe and find anything trustworthy. When I witnessed for myself the love of God displayed by the body of Christ, along with the teaching of the Word that revealed the truth about God, I could see for myself God's presence; God became real to me. Furthermore, I could grasp more clearly the idea of forgiveness of sins through the love of Jesus Christ.

### ISM and the Koinonia Cross Model

When international students started arriving at Antioch Baptist Church, and ISM began twenty-five years ago, my wish was for each entering the church to see and experience the same God that I have known and experienced. Every new saved sinner begins the Christian life by building the Koinonia Cross relationships. The devotion to love one another teaches all members the depth of God's love. Love is something that can be best known by giving rather than receiving. It is no coincidence that those who only receive love but do not give act in an ungrateful and entitled manner.

There is nothing more difficult than loving others. Love has been the most challenging issue for many of the international students from Asian countries. Most are the only children in the family and are accustomed to being the center of attention. To achieve academically, they have devoted themselves solely to their studies at the expense of caring for others. Additionally,

many from Asian countries seem to view love as quid pro quo. Love is given with repayment in mind, almost like a marketplace transaction. As a result, working towards building the Koinonia Cross relationships has provided a concrete way for many in ISM to learn how to love.

Since relationships are central to the Koinonia Cross model, naturally, having a fruitful Koinonia Cross takes time. Learning to love as Christ has loved us does not happen overnight. International students who become Christians at Antioch Baptist Church are encouraged to remain in the church to be discipled. They are given the opportunity to develop their Koinonia Cross relationships further while increasing their knowledge of God by learning the Word. Thus, the priority for international students has been to grow spiritually rather than to rush to send them back to their home countries as missionaries. Despite their reputation as church planters, Paul and Rebekah Kim have always prioritized discipleship over everything else because one's relationship with God is what matters most.

In ISM at Antioch Baptist Church, when a new Christian begins to build his Koinonia Cross, the starting point is usually with those who ministered to him. As we are conducting Bible studies at the major universities in the area, ISM is divided into campus Bible study ministry groups, and each member's Koinonia Cross development takes place in these groups. The members are assigned to a Bible study group affiliated with their background, typically the university they attend or have graduated from. Over time, the relationships expand to those in the other Bible study groups in ISM and other departments in the church. When anyone is sent out as a missionary to a new or existing church overseas, they form new relationships on top of the existing relationships, making the Koinonia Cross relationships more abundant.

What should be apparent about the Koinonia Cross model is that it naturally creates a discipleship relationship. Spiritual leaders and peers form the discipleship group that spurs one

another to live out the Word of God. The relationships can grow deeper by working through discipleship materials together, such as *MasterLife*.<sup>49</sup> In a way, the Koinonia Cross model is a built-in living discipleship with purposeful relationships.

Ideally, when a person has been a Christian long enough, a well-balanced set of relationships should develop on all sides of the Koinonia Cross. Therefore, a weakness in one or more sides is a warning sign in one's relationship with God. For ISM, the Koinonia Cross model has been instrumental because of the perennial issue of members preoccupied with maintaining only the appearance of being a good Christian. This model exposes this problem and is a good gauge of the genuineness of one's relationship with God as it can identify the internal spiritual problems that cause the Koinonia Cross relationships to be imbalanced.

Many are eager to serve in ISM, and the ministry is seldom short of volunteers. It is easy to assume that those who serve readily have a strong relationship with God. However, an imbalanced or even barren Koinonia Cross can show one's true motivation for serving. Eagerness to serve is a contradiction to one's lack of effort to love others. While relationships on the Koinonia Cross can often go unnoticed, serving is immediately noticeable. Thus, motivation to serve can often stem from a desire for recognition and self-glory. Years ago, when the church was quickly expanding foreign missions, many volunteered to serve overseas and received much deserved attention and recognition. Several from ISM also volunteered to be foreign missionaries. However, their barren Koinonia Cross exposed their weak spiritual condition. Sure enough, some recanted their decision to serve overseas when they found out the sacrifice of living as missionaries seemed too costly.

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<sup>49</sup> *MasterLife* is a workbook for discipleship written by Avery T. Willis, Jr. and published by LifeWay Press, Nashville, TN.

Some evangelized heavily and invested most of their time and effort in ministering to non-Christians. Eventually, a sizable number of sheep grew under them. However, the sheep portion of the Koinonia Cross was disproportionately substantial, while the other sides were barren. In time, their pride became evident because they indulged in recognition for their success and authority over their sheep. Meanwhile, they disliked being under leaders and following their suggestions. They were found to be arrogant and unteachable, oftentimes refusing to change.

Some were exceptionally generous and obedient to their leaders, while the rest of their Koinonia Cross was weak. Such people sought attention and recognition from leaders. More than that, they used good relationships with their leaders as an indication for the health of their spiritual life, giving themselves a false sense of assurance in their relationships with God. An undiscerning leader can easily confuse wrongly motivated attention as the desire to build a godly relationship. The Koinonia Cross can help identify disingenuous motives when it is reviewed in its entirety.

Some have simply tried very hard to build relationships with humanistic efforts. They were generous and kind and became very likable to everyone, and their Koinonia Cross appeared to be abundant on all sides. Yet, these relationships were not Christ-centered because their motivation was popularity and being well-liked. They avoided sharing painful truths to prevent offending or hurting anyone so their relationships could be preserved. As the foundation of these relationships was not built on Christ, their Koinonia Cross relationships did not last long and most simply eroded over time.

An essential element of the Koinonia Cross model is that when the church is committed to living it out, it allows everyone to be known by those in their Koinonia Cross relationships. Meaningful and caring relationship leads to knowing one another. There is a saying that goes,

“To know you is to love you.” Unless those in a relationship know one another, there is no relationship. The healthy Koinonia Cross relationships enable sins to surface because there is no room to hide sins, and those in close relationships help one another become cleansed. Thus, the Koinonia Cross model becomes a visible example of 1 John 1:7. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Unfortunately, the most common issue among the ISM members was the desire to maintain merely the appearance of godliness. For some, it seemed near obsession, and even a minor spiritual failure was too shameful for them to deal with. In order to save face, escape the shame, and hide the spiritual failure, some would resort to lying. Although some resorted to blatant lying, others used lies that stretched or only slightly twisted the truth, or “white lies.” Such dishonesty can easily go unnoticed. However, lies are harder to hide when one is entangled in relationships that are committed to building a strong Koinonia Cross through loving and knowing one another.

In a way, the Koinonia Cross model has been acting as a mirror for those in ISM, reflecting each person’s spiritual condition. Building Koinonia Cross relationships has been equivalent to walking in the light because sin problems are difficult to hide in the midst of strong and healthy Koinonia Cross relationships. All sinners tend to hide their sins, so close relationships are essential to eliminate the places where sins can be hidden. Some in ISM have hidden their sins by distancing themselves from others, and some have even left the church altogether. However, the most self-deceiving way of hiding sins has been conforming, the most common way of hiding sins for many in ISM. In conforming, sins are hidden behind one’s reputation of being a good Christian. It also gives the illusion of a good spiritual life. However,

the Koinonia Cross relationships developed over time have eliminated the places to hide sins and brought the true self to the surface.

### Concluding Thoughts on the Koinonia Cross Model in Practice

A collective effort made by those in the Koinonia Cross is needed to fight against sin. As stated previously in this thesis-project, we tend to remain in the darkness and avoid resolving our issues of sin. Moreover, when one struggles with sin, his heart becomes calloused and insensitive to the Word of God, which is the very “antidote” to be set free. In Matthew 13:14-17, Jesus describes the consequence of having a calloused heart while explaining why he spoke in parables. He said that because “people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears, they cannot hear, and their eyes, they have closed,” they neither understand nor perceive. Sins cause our hearts to become dull, making the self-realization of our sins extremely difficult. The Koinonia Cross relationships help us see what we cannot see on our own and lead us to the cross of Jesus Christ.

In essence, the image of the Koinonia Cross in action is like the story of Jesus healing the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12. A paralytic, who was unable to go near Jesus, was carried on a bed by four men to Jesus. They carried him to the roof above Jesus, “and when they had made an opening, let down the bed on which the paralytic lay” (Mark 2:4). When Jesus saw their faith, he forgave and healed the paralytic. This famous story reveals the deep friendship the four men had with the paralytic. At all costs, these four brought to Jesus the paralytic, who could not have gone to Jesus on his own. In their ideal state, the Koinonia Cross relationships would, at all costs, help one another come to the presence of Jesus.

The Word of God comes to life through God's forgiveness in the Koinonia Cross relationships. A church is simply a collection of forgiven sinners. All sins are against God and one another, and the Word of God commands us to forgive others as we have been forgiven. The strength of the Koinonia Cross in one's life is his willingness to forgive others, and this forgiveness includes celebrating together with the brother who repents. Our shared identities as forgiven sinners are what bind us in the Koinonia Cross together.

The Koinonia Cross relationships can be best described as family. While the church is called the family of God, the Koinonia Cross relationships act as one's immediate family members, and it is often within these relationships that special moments and milestones in life are shared. As Christian life is sanctification, the hard work of loving one another that we have been commanded to do is what sanctifies us in obeying the truth, which is God's Word. Through His Word and those who are committed to obeying His Word, the love of God is made manifest and visible for all to see and experience. The resulting fruit is unity among the members of the body of Christ, and there is no greater evidence of God's presence than unity within the church. Unity within church is the beginning of unity among all Christians and churches, and the universal unity among all God's children is what Jesus prayed for in his high priestly prayer (John 17).

## CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

### SANCTIFICATION AND THE CHURCH

#### **Understanding the Cultural Differences**

##### Culture and Christian Life

When it comes to ISM, one of the most significant challenges is ministering to people of different cultures. Each culture bears its own unique characteristics and traits. Many years ago, conflict occurred during a meal of hotpot when people could not agree over whether to cook the meat or vegetables first. Something as trivial as how to eat hotpot revealed the necessity to reconcile the differences between the two cultural habits. Understanding the intricacies of each culture is critical for more than just getting along with one another. Our cultural background affects how we see and understand God and live as Christians.

Our cultural experiences shape how we see the world and understand life. Accordingly, they can have a significant impact when it comes to grasping the Word of God and living out a life of faith in Christ. For example, Asian cultures are known to be extremely relationship-oriented, so those from Asian countries can perhaps more easily understand the relational aspects of Jewish culture and life described in the Bible. Anyone involved in ministry must be aware of the complex role and influence of one's cultural background in his relationship with God.

Though I am a Korean American, I am more American than I am Korean. Many years ago, a Chinese brother in ISM informed me that I did not understand Chinese people because I was not Chinese. Around the same time, a Korean brother told me I did not know Koreans because I was not a real Korean. Unfortunately, what they said was true. I did not know them

because I did not understand their cultural background well enough. I could not fully understand and grasp the parts of them informed by their cultural heritage. Only after many years of ministry experience did I become well aware of how much one's culture shapes his Christian life.

There is a common misconception that salvation instantly changes a person entirely at the very moment of decision. I can only wish! Despite being born again, the old nature persists.

Ralph Neighbour Jr. wrote in *Survival Kit for New Christians* that, even though we may be saved, we still have our old nature.<sup>1</sup> The old nature is there since birth, and it is like gravity as it constantly pulls us down to revert to our former selves before salvation.<sup>2</sup> And the old nature, which does not quickly go away, has been shaped and influenced by our culture.

In Asian culture, one of the most pervasive habits is what is known as “saving face.” The term is frequently used to underline the significance of public honor. The face is equivalent to a person’s worth or image. Accordingly, there is an ancient Chinese saying, “死要面子活受罪,” which means dying to save face to the point of living miserably. In their book, *China in Our Midst*, authors Glen Osborn and Daniel Su emphasize the importance of understanding the cultural background of Chinese scholars.<sup>3</sup> Though the book focuses on Chinese culture, similar traits can be found in other Asian cultures, as well. In Chinese culture, one’s self-worth and significance are tied to his relationships with those close to him.<sup>4</sup> When a Chinese person succeeds, honor is brought upon himself and upon those in close relationships with him, such as his family. The same can be said of shame. In traditional American culture, a person does not

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph W. Neighbour, *Survival Kit for New Christians* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 2015), 40.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph W. Neighbour, *Survival Kit*, 40.

<sup>3</sup> Glen W. Osborn and Daniel B. Su, *China in Our Midst: Reaching Chinese International Students in America* (Mechanicsburg, PA: China Outreach Ministries, 2017), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Osborn and Su, *China in Our Midst*, 30.

identify himself as closely to others because individualism is highly valued and emphasized.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, success and failure remain primarily the individual's honor or shame.

Honor and shame are universal concerns, and people make great efforts to save face. Yet the difference between Asian and American cultures is that an Asian person feels greater pressure to save face because the pain and shame of failure felt is extended to a broader group of people. It is not only one person's shame but the shame of the entire family. Such pressure is ingrained in the culture and way of life. As honor and shame are magnified in Asian society, there is greater pressure on oneself to succeed and, equally, to avoid shame.

Additionally, what makes international students in America unique from others is that most grew up as top performers in school, and many have accordingly nurtured a competitive nature.<sup>6</sup> And in the case of Asian international students, competitiveness only adds fuel to the tremendous internal pressure to succeed and avoid the shame of failure. I have heard many stories of those who encounter a single instance of small academic failure, thus leading them to wallow in misery and approach a state of depression.

The drive to succeed that undergirds this innate desire to save face can motivate a Christian to give his best effort in living for God. After all, living for God requires perseverance and discipline; it is hard work. By the same token, it can also produce wrong reasons for serving and giving, such as a desire for recognition and personal honor in order to save face. Thus, the motivation to serve may not always be pure. Of course, to some degree, practically every Christian is guilty of seeking recognition. However, it is unspiritual for such a desire to be of a substantial degree or near obsession.

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<sup>5</sup> Osborn and Su, *China in Our Midst*, 30.

<sup>6</sup> Osborn and Su, *China in Our Midst*, 26.

Accordingly, good Christian behavior does not always equate to being a good Christian. When good Christian behavior is constantly accepted as a good Christian life, it reinforces the value of outer change rather than inner change. Inner change comes from overcoming sin through repentance, which is very painful. Thus, a sinner will naturally gravitate towards changing external behavior rather than working to transform the heart. Serving and giving, outward actions, can never be a substitute for internal change, which can only come from repentance. Those from cultures that value saving face will naturally often prioritize outer change over inner change.

I have also observed that lying is quite prevalent in Asian cultures. Saving face and lying form a natural partnership, and most lies are only slight variations of the truth. For Asians, there exists a wide range of tolerance when it comes to lying, while Americans tend to be very strict about lying. Practically all cultures believe lying is wrong, yet some cultures tolerate them more than others – such as Asian cultures. Having spent most of my life in the U.S., I often struggled to understand and accept those who twisted the truth to evade trouble or gain favors.

There are historical reasons why some cultures brush lying aside more than others. Martin Gannon wrote in *Paradoxes of Culture and Globalization* that ethics can be perceived and practiced in universal or relative ways, and individualistic cultures tend to follow a universal ethical standard, whereas collective cultures tend to follow a relative ethical standard.<sup>7</sup> A universal ethical standard means that the same ethical principles apply to all situations with hardly any exceptions, such as stealing, cheating, and lying are simply unacceptable.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, a relative ethical standard can be situational and may have exceptions.<sup>9</sup> In comparing universal

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<sup>7</sup> Martin J. Gannon, *Paradoxes of Culture and Globalization* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2007), 101.

<sup>8</sup> Martin J. Gannon, *Paradoxes of Culture and Globalization*, 101.

<sup>9</sup> Martin J. Gannon, *Paradoxes of Culture and Globalization*, 101.

and relative ethical standards, the author highlights one key factor in the cause of a culture gravitating toward an ethical standard. In a culture that predominantly practices a universal ethical standard, its authoritative system, such as the judicial system, rewards or punishes more consistently.<sup>10</sup> However, the authoritative system is far less consistent in a culture that practices a relative ethical standard. Furthermore, a nation's history of trials and tribulations can significantly impact which of the two standards is more prevalent.<sup>11</sup>

China is a good example of a nation that follows a relative ethical standard. The difficult history that China has gone through, which includes many wars with invaders, civil wars, and the rise of communism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, has made the practice of a universal ethical standard extremely challenging.<sup>12</sup> For example, during the cultural revolution of the 1960s, when neighbors and even family members could not be trusted, many had to lie to simply survive.<sup>13</sup> In chaotic moments caused by injustice and unfairness, lying to defend oneself can be understandable. China is a calmer nation now, though suppressing personal rights is still prevalent. Yet, the relative ethical standard remains strong.

In general, living according to a universal ethical standard is preferred. However, history teaches us that such an ideal is something a society must be able to afford to do. Living in a country like the U.S. that practices a universal ethical standard should not be taken for granted. Indeed, I do sympathize with those who come from places that practice a relative ethical standard, as the history of their countries has, more often than not, been filled with tragic events and suffering. A significant disadvantage for those from countries that practice the relative ethical standard is that they often adopt a casual attitude toward lying. Unfortunately, this

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<sup>10</sup> Martin J. Gannon, *Paradoxes of Culture and Globalization*, 101-102.

<sup>11</sup> Martin J. Gannon, *Paradoxes of Culture and Globalization*, 103-104.

<sup>12</sup> Martin J. Gannon, *Paradoxes of Culture and Globalization*, 103.

<sup>13</sup> Martin J. Gannon, *Paradoxes of Culture and Globalization*, 103-104.

communal and societal attitude can affect one's Christian life. For those who place immense pressure upon themselves to avoid shame and have come from countries that practice a relative ethical standard, there can be a high propensity to lie to save face.

In my ministry, I have encountered Christians from these cultures who find complacency in acting like good Christians without the conviction to live for Christ. I would call this living a double life. I have witnessed this behavior go on for years without guilt by those who have found a way to adopt well-accepted Christian behaviors so that they can portray themselves as good Christians to others. Meanwhile, they do not allow the power of the Gospel to change their hearts because internal transformation requires facing the shame that accompanies the confession of sin and repentance.

Understanding the cultural backgrounds of the church members allows the church leaders to help discover the spiritual problems that lie beneath the external behavior. As alluded to earlier in this section, our cultural background strongly influences how we live out our Christian life. Thus, from my experience and observation, when the church leaders are well cognizant of the tendencies and intricacies of different cultures, they can better aid church members in discerning the genuineness of faith from what is disingenuous.

### Culture and Stereotyping

Knowing the cultural background of those in one's ministry is essential. It is equally critical to avoid stereotyping and placing everyone from a culture into a single category. What makes ministry challenging is that no two people are precisely the same. In the book *The World at Your Doorsteps*, Lawton Lau warns of the dangers of stereotyping. Each culture group's composition is too complex to be reduced to a list of characteristics, and stereotypes can lead to

judgmental attitudes.<sup>14</sup> Hastily made judgments based on assumptions of culture can isolate and certainly cause a loss of trust in the person in the ministry. Though it takes a lot of work, taking the effort and time to understand an individual in the church cannot be underestimated.

While Matthew Kim's book is geared toward preachers, it applies to shepherds of God's flock engaged in the ministry to people of different cultures because he emphasizes what he calls cultural empathy and the dangers of stereotyping.<sup>15</sup> When a person stereotypes another, he compartmentalizes the latter into categories of his own understanding and comfort level.<sup>16</sup> The author shares painful moments when he was stereotyped and notes that all cultures are susceptible to stereotyping each other, especially in the context of a minority amid a majority.<sup>17</sup>

The workers of ISM have to resist the natural tendency to falsely categorize people in order to understand unfamiliar cultures more easily. Stereotyping does not often come from negative motives or ill intentions. However, the pain can have a devastating effect, and I also have experienced the pain of having been stereotyped as I, of Asian descent, grew up in a predominantly Anglo region. The challenge for leaders is to have proper knowledge of the tendencies and expected behaviors of people from different cultures yet resist the temptation to categorize individuals and stereotype people. Thus, ISM can be highly challenging because of the complexities of ministering to peoples of different cultures.

It is, however, noteworthy that, while cultural background indeed impacts one's Christian life, no one culture has a special proclivity for sinfulness. In the backdrop of the holiness of God, all cultures exude the evils of human beings. Every single person is a sinner because of the

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<sup>14</sup> Lawson Lau, *The World at Your Doorstep: A Handbook for International Student Ministry* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 54.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 55.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 55-56.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 56.

inheritance of Adam's sinful nature. Apostle Paul writes in Romans, "None is righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). It is essential for spiritual leaders to discern carefully and not hastily conclude that one culture is more sinful than another.

Additionally, it is important to distinguish what is an unfamiliar cultural norm from what is sin. What is normal to one culture may seem unacceptable to another and could be misunderstood as a sin. In Asian culture, bad news can be withheld from loved ones to avoid hurting them. For example, when an elderly parent has a terminal illness, rarely would the children reveal the truth to the dying parent. On the other hand, those from another culture may want the dying parent to know their limited time on the earth to allow them to prepare for the impending passing. Should the truth always trump what could be perceived as dishonesty? The answer is not simple. Many years ago, I overheard two students arguing at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary about whether Rahab lying to her people to save the two spies of Israel was ethical or not. The Scripture seems to condone Rahab's lie to fulfill God's purpose. Lying is nevertheless, a sin, yet there are occasions in the Bible where it is allowed so that a greater will of God can prevail.

Understanding different cultures is not easy. This section is simply a quick glance at my discovery after 25 years of working in this ministry. One way to bring clarity into this challenging and complicated subject is to use God's perspective to understand cultural behavior. Without such understanding, sometimes we can falsely label noble deeds as sins and vice versa. As ministers of Christ in ISM, we must do everything to recognize what is sin and what is not a sin to guide those placed under our care to grow closer to Christ through sanctification.

## **Discipleship and Transformation**

Discipleship plays a central role in the growth of the church members because it aids in applying the Word of God to daily life. Most churches offer one form of discipleship or another, and there is a countless number of books written on this subject offering a wide range of approaches. The goal of all discipleships is the same, which is to help Christians grow in Christ. However, not all discipleship programs produce the same desirable result, which is to transform the lives of the members of the church.

The authors of *Transformational Discipleship* discovered that many churches wrongly equate discipleship with knowledge transfer when “the essence of discipleship is transformational and not informational.”<sup>18</sup> Discipleship focused on knowledge may mainly involve classes, lectures, reading materials, and discussions. However, when discipleship focuses on the transformation of lives, it more likely includes all aspects of Christian life as a part of its training. The authors of *Transformational Discipleship* also note that “Jesus never equated knowledge with discipleship.”<sup>19</sup> As 1 Corinthians 8:1 states, “knowledge puffs up;” knowledge alone without the proper mechanism to live it out could have an adverse effect.

Discipleship focused on transformation prioritizes sanctification. A church’s commitment to sanctification corresponds positively with the seriousness with which the church’s leadership views sin as a problem. In *Holiness*, J. C. Ryle emphasizes that “a proper knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity” and “the first thing, therefore, that God does when He makes anyone a new creation in Christ is to send light into his heart and show him that he is a guilty

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<sup>18</sup> Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 14.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 16.

sinner.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in his book, *the Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer details the understanding of the grace of God based on the individual’s view of the seriousness of sin. He differentiates costly grace from cheap grace in that costly grace seeks the forgiveness of sin through repentance.<sup>21</sup> In comparison cheap grace is the desire to embrace God’s grace without repentance.<sup>22</sup> He even goes as far as calling cheap grace “the bitterest enemy of discipleship.”<sup>23</sup>

When sin is not taken seriously, the emphasis on holiness suffers, and holiness can be taken as merely a desirable option. Yet, for God’s children, holiness was never an option but God’s command (1 Peter 1:15-16). Thus, discipleship must have its foundation in sanctification, from which comes all that discipleship wishes to accomplish, including training for the work of ministry. The distinguishing mark of Christian discipleship, as *Transformational Discipleship* states, is a transformed life itself.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the book emphasizes that “in theological language, discipleship is about our sanctification,” because the end goal is to be like Christ.<sup>25</sup> The main function of discipleship is to help sinners find a pathway to repentance and achieve humility as the chief goal. Thus, the chief end of the church is the sanctification of its members with glorification in mind.

Sanctification is extremely difficult for sinners to undergo because the ego will put up a fight and resist as much as possible. The very thing sanctification is trying to destroy will do all it can to remain alive and thrive. When we are crucified with Christ, then what dies is not the physical body but our will, in other words, ego. Dietrich Bonhoeffer explained this matter well in *The Cost of Discipleship*.

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<sup>20</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: For the Will of God is Your Sanctification – I Thessalonians 4:3*. Edited by Miller, P. (Abbotsford, WI: Aneko Press, 2019), 25.

<sup>21</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone Books, 1995), 13.

<sup>22</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 108.

Whenever Christ calls us, his call leads us to death. Whether we, like the first disciples, must leave house and vocation to follow him, or whether, with Luther, we leave the monastery for a secular vocation, in both cases the same death awaits us, namely, death in Jesus Christ, the death of our old self caused by the call of Jesus. Because Jesus' call brings death to the rich young man, who can only follow Jesus after his own will has died, because Jesus' every command calls us to die with all our wishes and desires, and because we cannot want our own death, therefore Jesus Christ in his word has to be our death and our life.<sup>26</sup>

Sanctification involves the process of becoming increasingly humble, which means dying to ourselves. Our death as Christians is simply the death of our ego. Discipleship that does not help destroy the ego will only be a program for transferring knowledge and promoting behavioral change. Concretely speaking, holiness begins and ends with humility. Only the genuinely humble willfully obeys the Word of God. Because we are sinners, even our greatest effort to be holy is full of corruption and defilement. All we can do is imitate the one who is most holy, God Himself. Our best chance of living a holy life comes from obeying the commandments of our Holy God.

In *Radical Disciples*, John Scott says that Christianity offers eternal life and life to the full, yet “it makes it plain that the road to life is death.”<sup>27</sup> This paradox requires one to first die in order to have life. Discipleship, or abiding in the call to follow Jesus, is described by Luke 9:23 according to the words of Jesus, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” John Stott writes that the Jews in the times of Jesus would know that carrying the cross meant a death sentence, and that those who choose to follow Jesus would also need to take up the cross daily, which is to die every day.<sup>28</sup> There is no other way to humility.

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<sup>26</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 53.

<sup>27</sup> John Scott, *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling* (Westmont, IL: IVP, 2014), 111.

<sup>28</sup> John Stott, *The Radical Disciple*, 115.

One of the biggest misconceptions made by Christians is the belief that sanctification happens naturally because of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit. But we must invite the Spirit of God to do the work in us by striving to be broken. Thus, the truth is that sanctification requires a great amount of effort and the effort required on our part should not be underestimated. We must do all that we can to resist sin and humble ourselves so that the work of sanctification by the Holy Spirit can take place. Paul states in Philippians 2:12-13 that “it is God who works in you,” but he also reminds the Philippian church that they should work out their “own salvation with fear and trembling.” J.C. Ryle emphasizes that “true Christianity is a fight” and “a true Christian is called to be a soldier.”<sup>29</sup> The more we take sanctification seriously, the more we grow compelled and motivated to fight the enemy who desires “to steal and to kill and to destroy” (John 10:10). There is no rest until Jesus returns and restores all things.

J. C. Ryles lists all we must fight against - the world, the flesh, and the devil.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, the Scriptures clearly warn the children of God against these elements. It is Satan’s lie that Christian life is a peaceful life. Such misconception bears forth complacent living and false spirituality, which both promote a good outer Christian lifestyle without internal transformation. Those with such a lifestyle obey God to the extent that allows them to be recognized as good Christians without the cost and pain of sanctification.

Sanctification is costly and painful because it requires fighting again sin. This fighting should not be done alone but with brothers and sisters in Christ who are equally or more determined to defeat the enemies of God. The strength of the Christ-centered relationships in the

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<sup>29</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, 51.

<sup>30</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, 53.

church will be tested in the daily battles against sin and Satan. The church should be a battlefield, and those in the Koinonia Cross relationships are fellow soldiers in this fight.

### **The Koinonia Cross and Sanctification**

The Koinonia Cross model defines for church members the plan and purpose for which we practice the commandments of Jesus to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39) and to love one another as Jesus has loved us (John 13:34). We cannot separate our love for one another from our love for God because God is love; our love for one another is evidence of having been born of God (1 John 4:7). The love of God is made known through the body of Christ, and the invisible God becomes visible through love. In evaluating the maturity of a church, Gene Getz, in *Measure of a Church*, states that “love is the manifestation of Christ-like behavior by a functioning body of believers” and “it is the most significant mark of maturity in a local body of Christians.”<sup>31</sup>

No one can argue against the fact that Jesus emphasized, taught, and demonstrated love, and he commanded us to love. The challenge lies in living out his teaching. When it comes to loving one another in the church, how to love and whom to love can be nebulous. As much as Christians are to love other believers, it needs to begin within the church, those whom God has brought to our proximity, such as those serving together in a ministry. With clearly defined people we must love, the concept of loving one another starts to become concrete. Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer wrote in their book *Transformational Church* that transformational churches are not only relational but intentional and have a bigger goal in mind.<sup>32</sup> Everything must be done in

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<sup>31</sup> Gene A. Getz, *Measure of a Church* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1981), 20, 22-23.

<sup>32</sup> Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 178.

the church with a clear purpose and intentionally in order to become a church that loves one another as commanded by Jesus.

The Koinonia Cross relationships are intentional, and the goal of the model is to live out the commandments of God so that we are prepared for the return of Jesus Christ. Thus, by loving one another in obedience to God and doing all that is required to love, we are sanctified and bring ourselves closer to the image of Christ. Furthermore, we bring ourselves closer to God's intended image for the church when we accept and treat the church as the family of God with devotion to loving one another.

Gene Getz, in his other book, *Building Up One Another*, uses Romans 12 to demonstrate what a biblical church would look like and writes that Apostle Paul's expectation for a church is for Christians to be "just as devoted to each other as are the individual members of a close-knit family unit."<sup>33</sup> He calls the church the family of God, and in regard to Romans 12:10, he refers to Apostle Paul stating that Christians ought to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ as in a biological family.<sup>34</sup> He also adds that the term 'brothers,' which is used 230 times in the new testament outside the Gospels, means 'from the same womb.' Accordingly, the word itself implies a familial relationship, and Christians "all have been born again into God's forever family."<sup>35</sup>

Being a part of a family means holding a deeply personal and everlasting commitment to the others in the family. As I wrote in Chapter 2, when I started attending Antioch Baptist Church, I met some members who chose to forgo good career opportunities in other locations to remain with the church. I found it so radical for Christians to sacrifice their careers and financial

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<sup>33</sup> Gene A. Getz, *Building Up One Another* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1977), 23.

<sup>34</sup> Gene A. Getz, *Building Up*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> Gene A. Getz, *Building Up*, 22.

future for their church. By calling the church the family of God, Gene Getz indicates that there is a sense of permanence and a commitment to one another as in a biological family that does not abandon its members. One of the most salient aspects of love is presence, and it is questionable to claim to love someone one has abandoned. In *Covenant Relationships*, Asher Intrater goes a step further and explains that the relationship between believers is a covenantal relationship. He wrote, “This absolute blood liability and loyalty are the principles that stand behind a biblical view of human relationships.”<sup>36</sup> In essence, being bound in the covenantal relationship to Christ by his blood is what binds us together.

Those committed to loving one another in such a relationship should not passively allow each other to live in sin. Gene Getz emphasizes, “There is no greater sign of love than to be willing to risk rejection and broken relationships with others.”<sup>37</sup> Even at the risk of being misunderstood and hated, we must share hard truths with a fellow brother who is living in sin. Helping one another in admonition is one of the most important ways to be sanctified. Asher Intrater points out that in Leviticus 19:17-18, you shall rebuke your neighbor, and you shall love your neighbor are parallel clauses.<sup>38</sup> There is no more direct or impactful path to sanctification than admonition by those in the family of God, motivated by the love of Jesus Christ. If the help we need for sanctification does not come from the family of God, where can it come from?

Sanctification leads to humility, and repentance must bring us to destroy the ego. Repentance is not merely a mechanism for forgiveness, but it ought to lead us to the ultimate goal, which is humility. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* shares the requirement of confession of sin within the community of Jesus Christ, the church, that leads us to break “the

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<sup>36</sup> Asher Intrater, *Covenant Relationships* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2016), 40.

<sup>37</sup> Gene A. Getz, *Building Up*, 51.

<sup>38</sup> Asher Intrater, *Covenant Relationships*, 90.

root of all sin [which] is pride.”<sup>39</sup> He shares that “Confession in the presence of another believer is the most profound of humiliation.”<sup>40</sup> And “By confessing actual sins, the self dies a painful, humiliating death before the eyes of another Christian.”<sup>41</sup> What he describes is walking in the light in 1 John 1:7, 9. To walk in the light is to humble oneself, be broken, confess one’s sins, and gain the forgiveness of God in the body of Christ.

I cannot underestimate the responsibility and challenge of bringing a person in sin to complete restoration. The Koinonia Cross relationships must grow in maturity not only to admonish one another but also to help one another experience genuine forgiveness and the restoration of relationships. Only when the relationships in the Koinonia Cross are committed to enduring the hardships of growing closer together can maturity take hold. Then, those in these relationships can become trustworthy and reliable sources to confess sins to, and together, they may experience the freedom that comes from complete forgiveness of sins. Gene Getz uses Galatians 6:1-2 to stress the importance of bearing one another’s sin in order to restore a brother living in sin, and it is the will of God.<sup>42</sup> As Apostle Paul instructed, it is the duty of those who are spiritually mature – “you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness” (Galatians 6:1).

Striving for sanctification through loving one another must be the goal of discipleship that leads to preparation for the return of Jesus Christ. With the return of Jesus will come judgment. The authors of *Created for Community* emphasizes that “judgment is one of the most pervasive theme in all of Scripture” and it “forms the boundary between our present and God’s

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<sup>39</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 1978), 89-91.

<sup>40</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 91.

<sup>41</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 91.

<sup>42</sup> Gene A. Getz, *Building Up*, 78-79.

future.”<sup>43</sup> This judgment includes the judgment of all humanity, and the Bible is certain that all humans will one day face divine judgment.<sup>44</sup> Not only the unbelievers, but believers will also face judgement from God (Romans 14:10-12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10). Accordingly, discipleship is the training ground for all believers who eagerly await and prepare themselves for the return of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>43</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, Jay T. Smith, and John Franke, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2015), 236.

<sup>44</sup> Grenz, Smith, and Franke, *Created for Community*, 238.

**CHAPTER 4: PROJECT DESIGN**

**EFFECTIVENESS STUDY OF THE KOINONIA CROSS RELATIONSHIP MODEL IN ISM**

**AT ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH**

The goal of this study is to understand the impact of the Koinonia Cross model on the lives of the ISM members of Antioch Baptist Church. When lived out, the Koinonia Cross model should bear close and intimate relationships with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and cleanse us from sin, as stated in 1 John 1:7. According to Apostle John, the evidence of our love for God is found in our love for one another (1 John 4:7-8). Our love for one another is a tangible gauge that measures our effort to love God by obeying His commands, which is what sanctification compels us to do. Thus, how well a person understands and lives out the Koinonia Cross model reveals his desire to grow in Christ. Accordingly, in this study, I desire to examine whether the Koinonia Cross model has been thoroughly integrated into the lives of the ISM members and is making a difference in their relationships with God.

The premise of the study lies in the belief that an application of the Koinonia Cross model will lead to the sanctification of the members of the church. The data collected and analyzed from the research should inform how well the model was implemented and whether it is accomplishing the intended purpose of sanctification. The success of the study will strongly depend on the ability to analyze both the quantitative and qualitative results as accurately as possible. Additionally, the testimonies shared at the end of this chapter serve as qualitative data of the sanctification taking place because of the Koinonia Cross model.

## **Research Project Design**

The primary method of data collection was the questionnaire, which allows data collection to be designed easily with analysis in mind.<sup>1</sup> The research participants were volunteers from ISM at Antioch Baptist Church. I conducted two questionnaires, the second being a follow-up to the first. The first questionnaire focused on the extent to which the Koinonia Cross model was taught and lived out and how it has influenced their relationship with God. The second questionnaire asked for short answers that helped explain some of the results from the first questionnaire.

Besides the standard questionnaire questions, the survey utilized two additional ways of information gathering. The first is the use of Likert-type items by asking for a degree of agreement or disagreement with a statement, and interestingly, “extensive research indicates that none are clearly superior to Likert-type item.”<sup>2</sup> The Likert-type items can help quantify the qualitative responses, simplifying the data-gathering and analysis process. The second is the Metanoia Matrix developed by David Um for his Doctor of Ministry thesis, and it helps determine the level of influence for each source “which God used to change a disciple over time, since the point of salvation.”<sup>3</sup> This methodology can help evaluate the extent to which each side of the Koinonia Cross is influencing the Christian life of the participants.

The questionnaire was created on Google Forms.<sup>4</sup> Using Google Forms made responding to the questionnaires easy for the participants and preserved their anonymity by gathering data

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<sup>1</sup> Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide: For Small-Scale Social Research Projects* (McGraw-Hill Education, 2017), 183.

<sup>2</sup> Mildred L. Patten, *Questionnaire Research: A Practical Guide* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 34.

<sup>3</sup> David Um, “Developing a Unified Disciple-Making Strategy for Antioch Baptist Church to Reach College Students in Boston, Massachusetts” (Doctor of Ministry Thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 57-64.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.google.com/forms/about/>.

automatically. I held a meeting with all the participants to ensure that the instructions were clear and that they would understand the questions as intended. The categories in the questions that needed to be evaluated by the participants were also clarified in order to eliminate any ambiguity. Since the second questionnaire asked to explain the results of some of the questions from the first questionnaire, open-ended questions were asked in the second questionnaire. For this questionnaire, I wanted the participants to have the freedom to express their opinions. The responses for each question went through coding, a categorization of the data based on commonalities.<sup>5</sup> The coding helped identify the most common or dominant answers. The questionnaires are in Appendices B and C, and the results of the questionnaires are in Appendices D and E.

Undoubtedly, no research methodology is perfect. This research was done with the understanding that there are limitations to the questionnaire methodology of collecting data. Questionnaires provide a snapshot of the whole picture, and they can sometimes miss out on obtaining in-depth information.<sup>6</sup> Another limitation of questionnaires is the participants' desire to give what they perceive as the correct answer rather than an honest answer.<sup>7</sup> Even though the individual's responses were anonymous, the temptation to respond with answers that provide a healthier picture of their Koinonia Cross still lies. Understanding that no research methodology is perfect, my desire is for the personal testimonies to serve as part of the data that further demonstrates the impact of the Koinonia Cross model. To have a sufficient sample size, I included a total of nine personal testimonies in this chapter.

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<sup>5</sup> Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, 116.

<sup>6</sup> Mildred L. Patten, *Questionnaire Research*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Mildred L. Patten, *Questionnaire Research*, 3.

## **Project and Results**

The research involved various members from ISM at Antioch Baptist Church who came to the U.S. as international students. A total of 25 volunteered to participate in the questionnaires. As I have been serving in this ministry for the past 25 years, the participants have been under the care of my wife and me. Thus, I am well familiar with each participant, many of whom I came to know even before they were saved.

I conducted two sets of questionnaires.<sup>8</sup> The first questionnaire asked about their background information, the teaching of the Koinonia Cross model at the church, and the practice of the Koinonia Cross model by the participants. The second questionnaire asked for reasons behind the responses to some of the questions in the first questionnaire. As stated earlier, I held a meeting and went through every question and explained the intention of each question. This meeting proved extremely important because a range of interpretations for some of the questions was observed. The lack of familiarity and experience with responding to questionnaires and English being the second language for the participants may have contributed to the different interpretations. The questionnaire responses came shortly after the meeting.<sup>9</sup> I compiled the aggregate data to analyze the extent to which the participants understood, were impacted by, and practiced the Koinonia Cross model.

### **Background of Participants**

The first set of questions asked for the background information of the participants. I followed the guidelines for collecting demographic information in *Questionnaire Research* by

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<sup>8</sup> The first questionnaire was distributed on August 3, 2023, and the second questionnaire on September 14, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> The participants responded within 48 hours.

Mildred Patten to avoid sensitive topics.<sup>10</sup> The background information does more than explain the demographics of the participants because it helps with providing context, a better understanding of the research results, and observing correlations. Correlations between the background and results can uncover helpful insight into the impact of the Koinonia Cross model.

As for the participants and their background, most are married, immigrated from China, came to the U.S. to pursue a Ph.D., majored in a STEM field, and were atheists before becoming Christians at Antioch Baptist Church. Though I did not ask in the survey, most were not exposed to Christianity prior to attending Antioch Baptist Church. Table 4 represents the summary of their backgrounds. Three categories - the country of origin, field of study, and religious background - are consistent with the international student demographics data reported in Chapter 1.

<u>Gender</u>		<u>Marriage Status</u>		<u>Country of Origin</u>
Male	14/25 (56%)	Single	8/25 (32%)	China 22/25 (88%)
Female	11/25 (44%)	Married	17/25 (68%)	Japan 1/25 (4%)
				Korea 2/25 (8%)
<u>Education Pursuit</u>		<u>Field of Study</u>		<u>Religious Background</u>
Ph.D.	15/25 (60%)	STEM	21/25 (84%)	Atheist 20/25 (80%)
Master's	8/25 (32%)	Business	1/25 (4%)	Buddhist 2/25 (8%)
Bachelor's	0%	Liberal Arts	1/25 (4%)	Christian 1/25 (4%)
Post Doc	1/25 (4%)	Art & Music	1/25 (4%)	Others 2/25 (8%)
F2 Visa <sup>11</sup>	1/25 (4%)	Others	1/25 (4%)	

Table 4. Background of the participants.

Another piece of background information asked was the number of years the participants have been attending Antioch Baptist Church. As shown in Figure 5, 60% have been at the church

<sup>10</sup> Mildred L. Patten, *Questionnaire Research*, 23-28.

<sup>11</sup> F2 Visa is for the spouse of the international student.

for more than ten years and 40% for less than ten years. The vast majority of the participants had a significant amount of exposure to the Koinonia Cross model. This fact is important because the quality of the responses depends on how familiar the participants are with the Koinonia Cross model and how long they have lived it out.

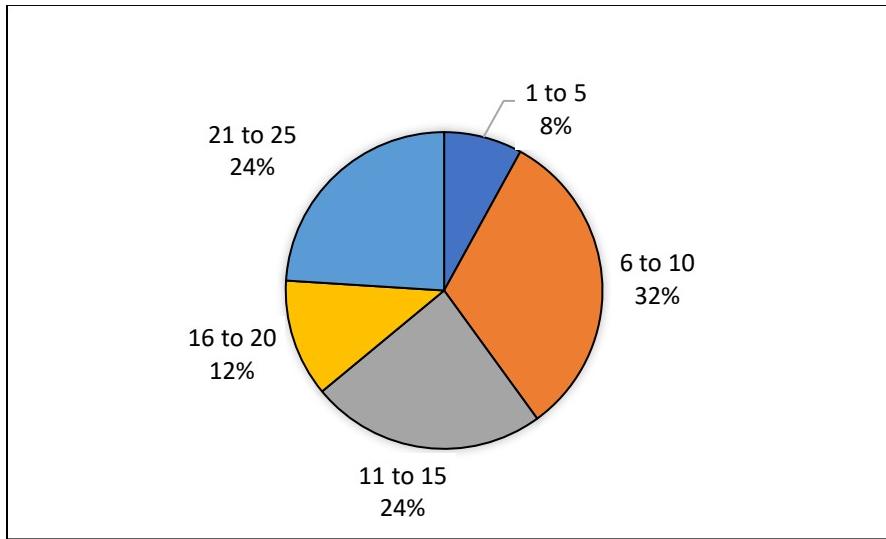


Figure 5. Number of years attending Antioch Baptist Church.

### Impact of the Koinonia Cross Model on Participants

The next set of questions was designed to measure how the Koinonia Cross model has been impacting the participants' relationships with God. Before anything else, the participants were asked whether the Koinonia Cross model is a core part of Antioch Baptist Church. Every participant strongly agreed that it is a core part of the church, as shown in Figure 6. This is a very general question, but the fact that not a single person felt anything less than to "strongly agree" with this question indicates that the Koinonia Cross model is highly emphasized at Antioch Baptist Church. The results of other questions will prove this is the case.

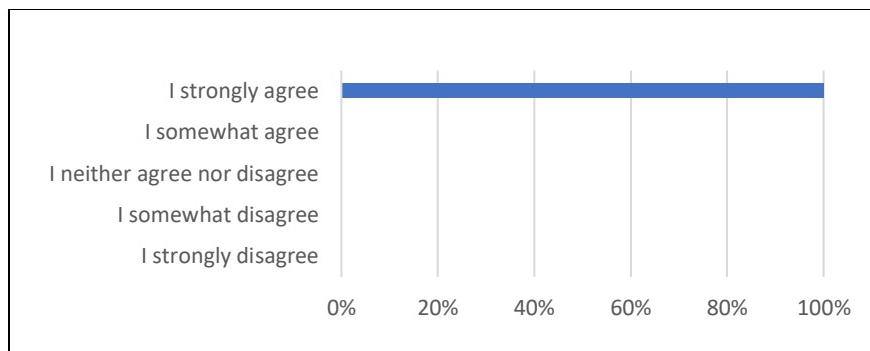


Figure 6. The Koinonia Cross model is a core part of Antioch Baptist Church.

Next, the participants were asked about the extent to which the Koinonia Cross model is taught in all areas of teaching at Antioch Baptist Church. At Antioch Baptist Church, the four primary ways that the Word of God is taught are Sunday sermons, weekly Bible studies, small group meetings, and one-on-one meetings. According to the participants, the Koinonia Cross model is taught across the board in all areas of teaching at Antioch Baptist Church. For each type of teaching, between 80% and 90% of the participants selected “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree.” See Figure 7.

This result supports the previous question regarding the Koinonia Cross model as a core part of the church. It reveals that the spiritual leaders, those responsible for teaching the Word of God, firmly believe that the Koinonia Cross model is biblical and is paramount in the lives of the church members. Even though the Koinonia Cross may not be mentioned by name in every sermon, the participants find its biblical concept in the teachings they hear. Building relationships with fellow Christians, especially with those in the same church, is a direct application of the command of Jesus to love one another, and this is at the heart of the Koinonia Cross model.

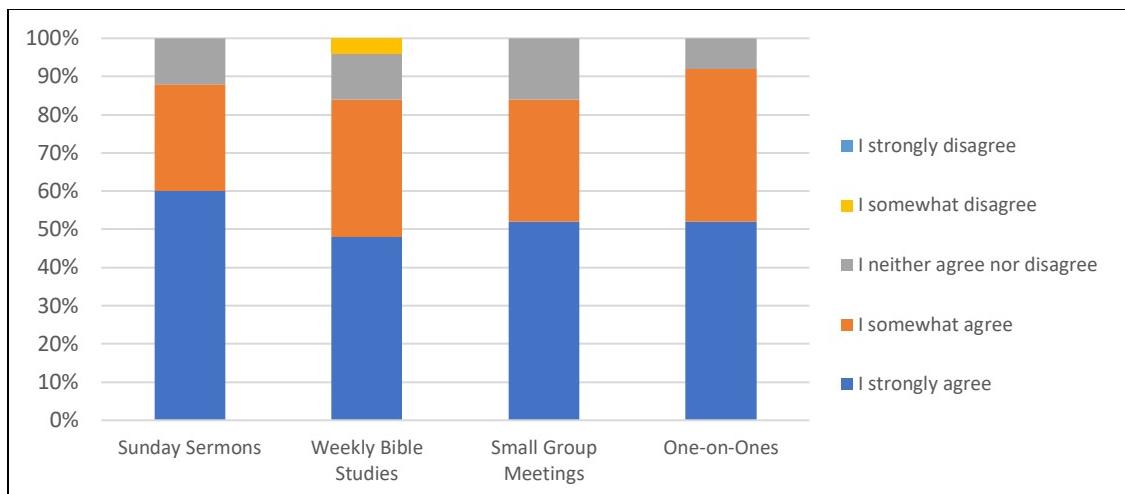


Figure 7. The Koinonia Cross model is taught regularly at Antioch Baptist Church.

The questionnaire also sought to determine how much the Koinonia Cross model has impacted the participants in different areas of their relationships with God. In what ways has the Koinonia Cross model helped them live out their Christian life? The question considered five categories of Christian life - the Word of God, prayer life, witnessing, repentance, and relationships. The results show that the Koinonia Cross model has had a very strong influence in every area of their Christian life, with those who “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” at nearly 90% or higher for all five categories. The results show that Christ-centered relationships, as defined by the Koinonia Cross model, provide a support structure for helping one another grow in Christ. See Figure 8.

To find deeper insights into the response to the previous question, the participants were asked to rate the different sources of influence for the five categories of Christian life using the metanoia matrix method.<sup>12</sup> The aim was to determine the strength of the influence of each

<sup>12</sup> David Um, *Developing a Unified Disciple-Making Strategy*, 57-64.

relationship on the Koinonia Cross model. Again, the five categories of Christian life studied were the Word of God, prayer life, witnessing, repentance, and relationships.

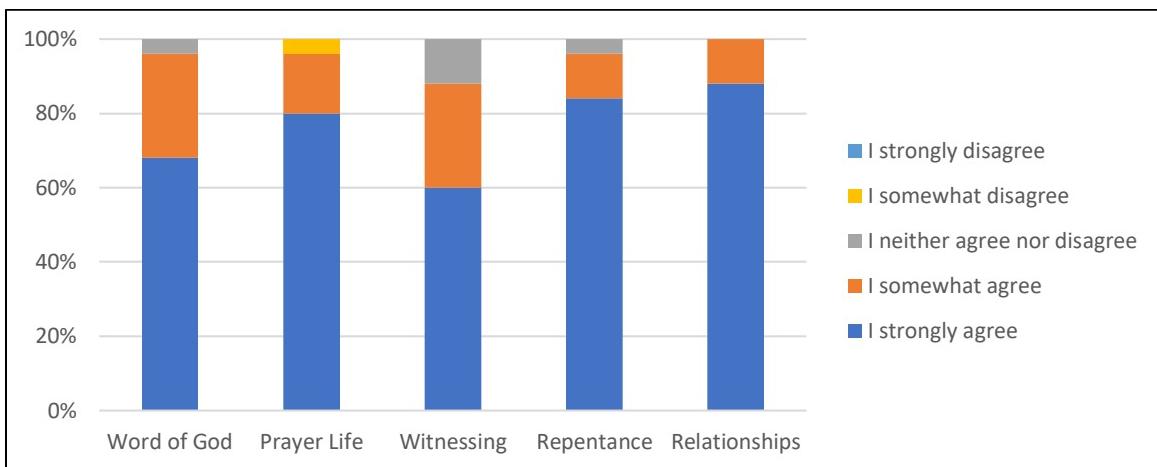


Figure 8. Impact of the Koinonia Cross model on Christian life.

For each category, I considered six sources of influence - the four sides of the Koinonia Cross relationships, the self, and others. “Self” represents personal initiative and effort. “Others” are those outside of the Koinonia Cross relationships. The sum of all the sources of influence must be 100% for each category. This question measures whom they depend on for each category. The data collected from those who are married and those who are single were analyzed separately because those who are single do not have a spouse.

The responses are found in Figures 9 and 10. When analyzing the results of both those who are married and those who are single, the immediate observation is the influence of the spiritual leaders. For each category of Christian life, at least 50% of the influence came from spiritual leaders. Influence can be interpreted as reliance and dependence. To a lesser extent, the next in the ranking was spiritual peers. Coming in third for those married was their spouses, and for singles, it was self.

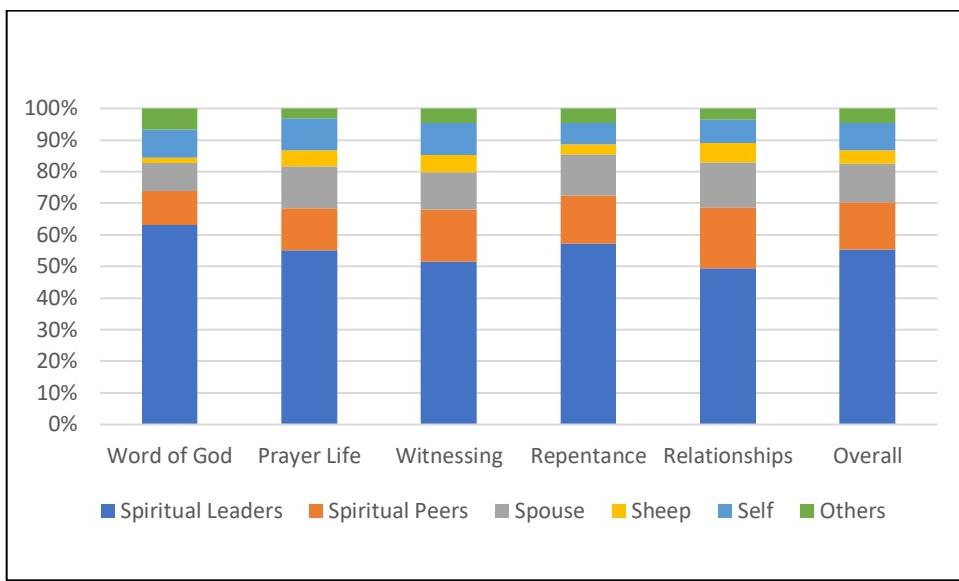


Figure 9. Impact of the Koinonia Cross relationships on Christian life (married).

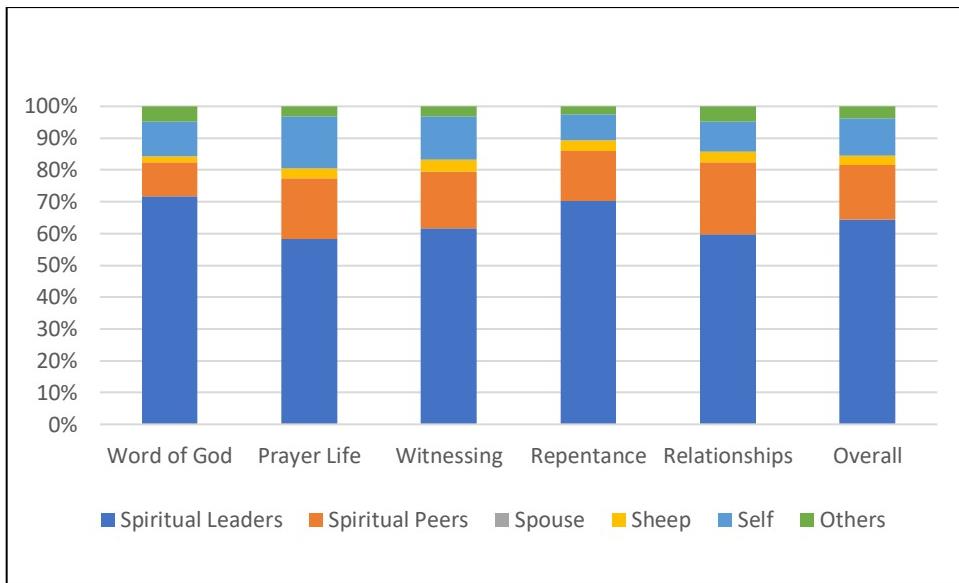


Figure 10. Impact of the Koinonia Cross relationships on Christian life (singles).

Spiritual leaders who prove most influential reveal the importance of discipleship held at Antioch Baptist Church. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Koinonia Cross relationships form natural discipleship groups. Effective discipleship is sharing life together in addition to

traditional discipleship learning. The most important relationship in a discipleship setting is with the spiritual leaders. The result of this question reflects the strength of the relationship the participants have with their spiritual leaders and the guidance that the spiritual leaders provide to the participants.

I analyzed the data further to look for correlations between the number of years at the church and the change in the level of dependency with the six sources of influence. Since those who are single have not been at the church long enough for this analysis, and the evaluation includes the spouse relationship, only the data from married participants were examined. I analyzed the data for the “overall” category from Figure 9. The sample size was 17: twelve with more than ten years at the church and five with less than ten years.

A very interesting observation can be made from the analysis. Of the married, there is a greater dependence on leaders by those who have been attending church for more than ten years than those who have been attending less. See Table 5. The other sources of influence remain about the same statistically, as the differences in the level of influence are much smaller than the margin of error. Regarding the level of difference for spiritual leaders, the mean is 9%, and the median is 13%. Though the sample size is small, the difference observed in the years at the church and the influence of the spiritual leaders is worth noting.

	Spiritual Leaders	Spiritual Peers	Spouse	Sheep	Self	Others
< 10 Years	52%	19%	15%	2%	8%	5%
> 10 Years	61%	15%	12%	6%	10%	5%

Table 5. Impact of Koinonia Cross relationships by years at Antioch Baptist Church.

The difference can be attributed to the following reasons. It is reasonable to assume that those who have been at the church for more than ten years are more spiritually mature. The participants became Christians at Antioch Baptist Church, so the length of attendance and their Christian age are similar, and the more mature the Christian, the more dependent on the spiritual leaders. The longer anyone has been a Christian, the more he should realize his depravity as a sinner. Also, those who have been Christians longer have become spiritual leaders themselves. They understand the importance of spiritual leadership over the sheep from their own experience. The analogy of new parents who come to fully understand the critical role parents play in the lives of their children helps explain this correlation. Often, it takes suffering and caring for the sheep to recognize the importance of shepherds. It is reasonable to conclude from this section that the value of spiritual leaders to their sheep cannot be understated.

### The Practice of the Koinonia Cross Model

The next set of questions focused on how the Koinonia Cross model is practiced by the participants. The first question within this topic asked whether the participants had spiritual leaders, spiritual peers, and sheep. The question did not ask about the spouse because the background information includes this data. 100% of the participants had spiritual leaders, 100% had spiritual peers, and 88% had sheep. See Table 6. This information does not provide the quality of each side of the Koinonia Cross relationship. However, it indicates that the participants are well involved in building their Koinonia Cross relationships.

Spiritual Leaders	25/25 (100%)
Spiritual Peers	25/25 (100%)
Sheep	22/25 (88%)

Table 6. The Koinonia Cross relationships with spiritual leaders, spiritual peers, and sheep.

The participants were also asked how often they have been evaluating their Koinonia Cross. Evaluating one's Koinonia Cross means examining each side of the Koinonia Cross and assessing its current condition. As explained in Chapter 2, each side of the Koinonia Cross exposes the strengths and weaknesses of one's personal relationship with God. Included in this evaluation exercise is determining ways to make improvements. Though spiritual leaders and peers, along with spouses, can contribute to the evaluation process, this question looks at the rate of self-evaluation initiated by the participants themselves.

Since the Koinonia Cross model serves as a spiritual inventory, as discussed in Chapter 2, the desire to perform a self-evaluation of their Koinonia Cross relationships serves as a good indicator of how seriously the participants take their relationship with God. Nearly 90% responded that they evaluate at least once every six months, with 52% stating every three months. See Figure 11. The results again reflect the emphasis of the Koinonia Cross model at Antioch Baptist Church and, at the same time, the willingness of the participants to improve their relationship with God.

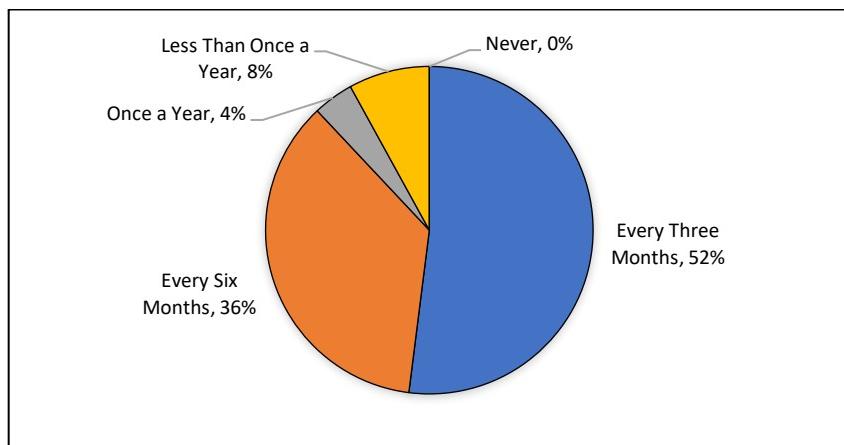


Figure 11. Frequency of personal evaluation of the Koinonia Cross.

Another way to evaluate how well the participants practiced the Koinonia Cross was to ask them whether they could teach the Koinonia Cross model to others. The overwhelming majority were confident that they could teach the model. 52% “strongly agreed” and 44% “somewhat agreed.” See Figure 12. The result of this question gives an indication that their understanding, belief, and practice of the Koinonia Cross model are strong. This data also coincides well with the result that shows the extent to which this model is taught at the church, and some of the participants had directly taught this model to their sheep.

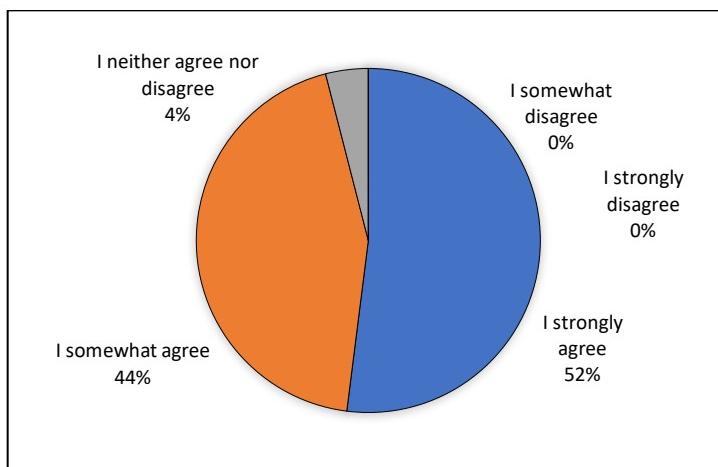


Figure 12. Participants’ ability to teach the Koinonia Cross Model.

The strength of the Koinonia Cross lies in its service as our spiritual inventory, as the relationships on the Koinonia Cross should be able to reveal to us hard truths about ourselves. The quality of a relationship is often indicated by its participants’ willingness to share “tough love” with one another. Without the basis of trust, the truth can become easily misunderstood and even harmful. Of the four sides of the Koinonia Cross, spiritual leaders, spiritual peers, and spouses are most suited and prepared to share the truth with us. Accordingly, the participants

were asked whether they believed their spiritual leaders and spiritual peers knew them well enough to help them grow in Christ. The same was not asked of their spouses for privacy concerns.

92% responded that they “strongly agree,” and 8% “somewhat agree” that their spiritual leaders knew them well. This finding is significant because it reveals that the participants trust their spiritual leaders with matters that help their growth as Christians. Regarding their spiritual peers, 20% “strongly agreed,” and 80% “somewhat agreed.” The relationships the participants have with their spiritual peers lack the level of trust and closeness they have with their spiritual leaders. This is expected given the fact that the length of their relationships with their spiritual leaders most often started earlier than with their spiritual peers. Also, naturally, spiritual leaders should be more mature, so they should know the participants better than their spiritual peers do.

See Table 7.

	Leader(s)	Peer(s)
I strongly agree	23/25 (92%)	5/25 (20%)
I somewhat agree	2/25 (8%)	20/25 (80%)
I neither agree nor disagree	0%	0%
I somewhat disagree	0%	0%
I strongly disagree	0%	0%

Table 7. How well the spiritual leader(s) and spiritual peer(s) know the participants.

Similarly, participants were asked how well they knew their spiritual peers and sheep. For the questions that referenced the sheep, only those who had sheep answered them, which was 22 out of 25 participants. The spiritual peers and sheep are those the participants would be expected to influence directly with their relationship with God. How well the participants know them is a good indicator of how much effort they have made to care for them. The results are

shown in Table 8. Again, the same was not asked of the spouse for privacy concerns. The results indicate that the participants believe they have adequate, but not extremely close, spiritual peer relationships. 12% responded that they “strongly agree” that they know their spiritual peers, and 76% responded that they “somewhat agree.” The relationship with their spiritual peers is satisfactory, but there certainly is room to grow closer.

Meanwhile, the relationship with the sheep had the most room to grow. 23% responded they “strongly agree” that they know their sheep, and 45% responded that they “somewhat agree.” The rest of the participants, 32%, responded that they did not know their sheep well enough. In some cases, with sheep, it is a one-way relationship because not all are interested in a committed Christ-centered relationship with their spiritual leaders. Of all the relationships on the Koinonia Cross model, the relationship that the spiritual shepherds have with their sheep could be understood as the most challenging.

	Peer(s)	Sheep
I strongly agree	3/25 (12%)	5/22 (23%)
I somewhat agree	19/25 (76%)	10/22 (45%)
I neither agree nor disagree	1/25 (4%)	4/22 (18%)
I somewhat disagree	2/25 (8%)	3/22 (14%)
I strongly disagree	0%	0%

Table 8. How well the participants know their spiritual peer(s) and sheep.

The final question of the first questionnaire asked which of the Koinonia Cross relationships were the strongest and weakest. This question encapsulates the previous questions related to the relationships in the Koinonia Cross. Once again, the spouse was excluded from the questionnaire for privacy concerns. See Table 9. As expected, the strongest relationship was with their spiritual leaders at 91%. This result is consistent with the earlier responses by the

participants that their spiritual leaders knew them well and the spiritual leaders were most influential. Once more, this result reflects the importance Antioch Baptist Church places on discipleship. The data from those with sheep, 22 participants, was analyzed.

	Strongest	Weakest
Spiritual Leader(s)	20/22 (91%)	0%
Spiritual Peer(s)	2/22 (9%)	10/22 (45%)
Sheep	0	12/22 (55%)

Table 9. The strongest Koinonia Cross relationship.

As for the weakest relationships, the spiritual peers and sheep came at 45% and 55%, respectively. These relationships were viewed as needing the most improvement, and again, they correlate with the result from the previous questions on how well the participants knew those in their Koinonia Cross relationships. One important fact to note is that the questions about the strongest and the weakest relationships is that the questions pit the relationships against each other. Thus, the response is a reflection of the relative order of closeness. The weakest does not necessarily imply a very poor relationship. The responses reflect which relationship the participants value most, and it is the relationship with the spiritual leaders.

### Follow-up Questions and Results

In order to gain insight into some of the results of the first questionnaire, I conducted a follow-up questionnaire that required short answers. The objective of the second questionnaire was to better understand the reasons behind the results observed in the first questionnaire. An advantage of the short-answer questionnaire is that the answers were not limited to the choices determined by the questionnaire, and the participants were free to express their own answers. A

disadvantage is the necessity of analyzing a wide range of responses. For each question, I grouped similar responses to make analyzing the data easier. For this questionnaire, 22 out of 25 participants from the first questionnaire were available to participate.

Figure 11 from the first questionnaire indicates that 88% of the participants evaluate their Koinonia Cross relationships at least twice per year, personally analyzing the quality of each relationship defined by the model. I sought to find what compelled the participants to evaluate their Koinonia Cross relationships. See Table 10. For 77% of the participants, church teachings were the most influential factor that compelled them to evaluate their Koinonia Cross relationships.

The teachings have effectively guided the participants to understand the importance of the Koinonia Cross in their relationship with God and to take action by examining their spiritual inventory. This response is consistent with the results in Figure 7, which indicate that the Koinonia Cross is highly emphasized in all the teachings conducted at Antioch Baptist Church. This result indicates the effectiveness of teaching. Ideally, it is the teaching that must compel the church members to examine their own spiritual relationship with God. Self-revaluation is an essential part of applying the teaching. It goes without saying that for anyone to experience improvement, the evaluation process must be an integral part of Christian life. Without it, living out the Koinonia Cross model would be challenging.

Church teachings	17/22 (77%)
Leader initiated	2/22 (9%)
Self initiated	2/22 (9%)
Examples around me	1/22 (5%)

Table 10. Factors influencing how often to evaluate the Koinonia Cross.

The first questionnaire revealed that the spiritual leaders were the most influential relationship on the Koinonia Cross model. The results also showed that the participants highly valued the role of their spiritual leaders in their lives. Intuitively, this result makes sense because the primary responsibility of spiritual leaders is to guide their sheep to grow closer to God. As a follow-up, I asked the participants what qualities made the leaders most influential from the rest of the Koinonia Cross relationships. See Table 11.

The participants identified four qualities almost evenly as the reasons. Besides the knowledge of the Word of God, the other three qualities were related to the participants' personal relationships with their spiritual leaders, and these qualities had to do with the extent to which the participants trusted and felt known by them. This finding is important because trust must be at the heart of any meaningful relationship. Additionally, without trust, guiding the sheep away from sin and correcting mistakes would be practically impossible.

Leaders' teaching and knowledge of the Word of God	6/22 (27%)
Leaders know me and understand my needs	5/22 (22%)
Leaders help me see my sins	5/22 (22%)
Leaders are trustworthy	5/22 (22%)
Leaders love me	1/22 (5%)

Table 11. Reasons the spiritual leaders are most influential.

In relative terms, the relationships the participants had with their spiritual peers and sheep were less strong than with their spiritual leaders. When asked which of the relationships the participants believed were the weakest, a large majority highlighted their spiritual peers and sheep. And naturally, their spiritual peers and sheep were disproportionately less influential in their own relationships with God than their spiritual leaders. Again, a caveat to note is that the responses to the questionnaire were relative to one another. A strong response toward spiritual

leaders and a weak response toward spiritual peers do not automatically mean that their relationship with spiritual peers is poor. However, the responses do highlight the areas needing the most improvement, which are the relationships with their spiritual peers and sheep.

In the second questionnaire, 64% of the participants admitted that they had not prioritized their relationships with spiritual peers highly, and 36% encountered relationship challenges. See Table 12. Though reasons will vary, from my own experience, relationships with spiritual peers often require the most self-denial. In an equal status relationship, competition can easily occur, and submitting to one another can be challenging. In the midst of the busy lifestyles of the participants, spiritual peer relationships can easily be set aside.

When the participants were asked about how to improve their relationship with spiritual peers, 73% responded that they should spend more time with them, and 27% desired to improve their character or submit themselves to their peers. See Table 13. For one's relationship with God, spiritual leaders provide the teachings, but one's relationships with spiritual peers provide the opportunity to practice what he has learned. A healthy Koinonia Cross must have strong relationships on all sides, as defined by the model.

Low priority	14/22 (64%)
Relationship challenges	8/22 (36%)

Table 12. Reasons the relationship with the spiritual peers is weak.

Spend more time together	16/22 (73%)
Improve personal character	6/22 (27%)

Table 13. Ways to improve the relationship with the spiritual peers.

The first questionnaire indicated that the most difficult relationship on the Koinonia Cross was with their sheep, and the responses revealed that their relationships with their sheep are the weakest. When asked about the reasons for the weak relationships with their sheep, 64% of the participants responded that the sheep are difficult to care for, 18% responded lack of personal character, and 18% responded low priority. See Table 14. In a way, these responses state that helping the sheep know God and grow in Christ is extremely difficult. In response to the question asking how to improve their relationships with sheep, 55% of the participants responded that they require more prayer, and 27% responded that they need to spend more time together. See Table 15.

Sheep are not responsive	14/22 (64%)
Lack of personal character	4/22 (18%)
Low priority	4/22 (18%)

Table 14. Reasons the relationship with the sheep is weak.

Pray more	12/22 (55%)
Spend more time together	6/22 (27%)
Improve personal character	3/22 (14%)
Seek help from spiritual leaders	1/22 (5%)

Table 15. Ways to improve the relationship with the sheep.

The challenge of ministering to sheep is well noted in this study. Intuitively speaking, this result is understandable. Ministering to international students has become increasingly difficult. They are more self-sufficient now than ever before. The potential to live a comfortable and luxurious life after graduating makes the Gospel less attractive. Social media and pervasive entertainment distract them from exploring the meaning of life and the reasons for the emptiness they have in their hearts. The latest generation of international students does not seem to need

God. When I see international students today, I am constantly reminded of Apostle John's warning that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelievers from seeing the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). Despite these realities, we must be determined to share the Gospel in words and through concrete love and make God real to them.

### **Project Conclusion**

Based on the results of the research conducted on the participants from ISM at Antioch Baptist Church, it is reasonable to conclude that the Koinonia Cross model is an integral part of the church. The study shows that the Koinonia Cross model is systematically taught and practiced, and it is a fundamental part of Christian life at Antioch Baptist Church. As this model is deeply rooted in the lives of the church members, it provides a condition conducive to undergoing sanctification.

In all areas of its teaching, the church educates its members about the theology and importance of the practice of the Koinonia Cross. All ISM members have Koinonia Cross relationships, and they can identify their spiritual leaders, spiritual peers, and sheep. Furthermore, the constant teaching of the importance of the Koinonia Cross in their relationship with God compels the ISM members to examine their spiritual inventory.

The relationship within the Koinonia Cross most influential in helping one to grow in Christ is with the spiritual leaders. The participants of the research believed their spiritual leaders knew them well and were trustworthy. The significant role the spiritual leaders play in the lives of the church members reflects the emphasis on discipleship at Antioch Baptist Church. The discipleship process usually consists of a structure in which the dependence on the spiritual

leaders is evident. The Koinonia Cross relationships form a natural grouping for discipleship and a web of relationships that helps each member grow closer to God.

These findings are significant because they reveal that the Koinonia Cross model, which is well established among the church members, creates the base and foundation required for experiencing sanctification. Ultimately, Christ-centered relationships are paramount for any Christian to be cleansed from sin because sanctification cannot take place in isolation. We all desperately seek to avoid the shame of repenting for our sins. The Koinonia Cross model establishes godly relationships that share the love of Christ, especially in guiding one another through repentance and restoration. Nine personal testimonies in this chapter demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of the Koinonia Cross model for sanctification. They serve as the most essential data of the research and are included in alphabetical order of the testifiers' names.

### **Testimonies<sup>13</sup>**

#### **Caleb<sup>14</sup>**

After graduating from Tsinghua University in China, I came to MIT as a Ph.D. student in Physics. Before I became a Christian, I felt lost and tired, and my life was aimless. Ecclesiastes 1:14 says, “I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” I was invited to an outreach event held by Berkland Baptist Church, which is now Antioch Baptist Church, with the promise of free food, and I arrived early to make

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<sup>13</sup> The nine testifiers participated in both questionnaires.

<sup>14</sup> Detailed background of the testifier has been excluded for personal privacy reasons. Testimony is included by permission of the testifier. This testimony was written on August 8, 2022.

sure I did not miss out on the food. Though many Chinese international students attended the event, I was one of several who accepted their invitation to the Bible study weekly.

The love that the brothers and sisters had for one another and the non-Christians caught my attention. They were so different from the people I knew in the past. Compared to the Christians, I was very selfish, and the teachings from the Bible studies made me realize that I was a wretched sinner. However, I had to battle my ego for a long time before becoming a Christian. I did not want to surrender control of my life to God. But my ego was finally broken by the love of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for my sins. Since then, I have married a sister in Christ, and we now have two children. I have had the privilege to serve as an overseas missionary in different countries. God has enriched my life with countless blessings.

My life has been a long journey of realizations and life-changing moments that shaped and molded me as a follower of Jesus. God used the relationships in Christ to guide me. My shepherds helped me see my old nature so I could struggle and become more like Jesus. Without close relationships in the church, I may have believed I was a good Christian while I had many hidden sin problems.

When Dr. Rebekah Kim taught about the Koinonia Cross to the church, I was surprised by what I discovered. The Koinonia Cross model consists of four sides, representing the vertical and horizontal relationships in the church. If any of the sides were missing, it revealed what I lacked in my relationship with God. I examined all four sides of my Koinonia Cross relationships. What I discovered was not what I had hoped. My Koinonia Cross was surprisingly barren.

I busied myself with reaching out to international students, and many came to church. Some of them even became Christians. I tried very hard to build relationships by meeting them. I

regularly invited everyone and paid for their dinners. Naturally, I believed myself to be good and faithful to God. But my Koinonia Cross relationships were incomplete. While I had many sheep under my name, I did not have a strong relationship with my shepherds and peers. Pastor Joseph shared that I was more concerned about building my little kingdom because I had neglected the other relationships. He was right.

When Pastor Joseph asked me to switch to a different campus outreach group, and he reassigned some sheep under me to other leaders, I felt upset and even offended. However, this incident proved that I did not trust Pastor Joseph as the leader God placed in my life. While I had said that I trusted and appreciated him, I distrusted him when the time came for me to prove it. I took pride in the success of my ministry rather than humbling myself and trusting God in all circumstances. The Koinonia Cross model revealed my incomplete Christian life. I am independent by nature, self-reliant, and easily mistrusting of others. However, God is more interested in who I am than what I do for Him.

My next journey led me to foreign missions because my background fit the new mission work our church had opened overseas. Upon much prayer, my wife and I were convicted to join the mission work that was about to start with Pastor James Suh and his wife, Soomi. We were together for several years, and my independence was tested again. When they helped me understand my sins, I resisted with bitterness. I often misunderstood them because I did not see their heart for me. But each moment was an opportunity for me to repent for my pride and surrender myself to God.

One of my biggest tests came when they were convicted to go to another country for missions. I was well established in my current location as a professor with a large research group. Also, my children were doing well in school. Though it was not an easy decision at the

time, I knew that following them was what I needed for my relationship with God to grow. It was an opportunity to make a concrete commitment to trust God. Accordingly, I decided to follow them to the new mission field.

I also experienced the Koinonia Cross as a shepherd. When we were leaving the country, I believe it was the end of my relationship with all those we were reaching out to. Amazingly, one person I was ministering to decided to follow Pastor James and me for the same reason I wanted to follow Pastor James. Despite all the uncertainties, he was willing to leave his home country and start a new life as a missionary. I learned from this experience that only when I trust God can there be genuine fruit.

God continued to call us to other countries before leading us to settle in Fairbanks, Alaska. Each time Pastor James and Soomi moved, my wife and I followed them to be with the shepherds who knew us best. They have taught me that God desires my trust more than anything else. Being ministered by them and serving with them has been a blessing and joy I would not have experienced or understood without trusting God.

In my times of struggle, God led me to understand Abraham and Isaac's story in Genesis 22. Inexplicably, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. I used to believe God was so cruel, but I can understand the heart of God more with each passing day. What matters to God most is me, not what I can achieve for him. The sacrifice was a story of God's love for Abraham. My life has been a long journey. It cannot be equal to what Abraham went through. But, like Abraham, everything God led me through has been an expression of God's love for me.

### Christopher<sup>15</sup>

I was born and grew up in a large city in China. To prepare me for survival in this cruel world, my mother told me since I was young, “Others can steal everything from you except the knowledge in your brain.” I worked hard and entered Tsinghua University with the college entrance exam exempted. My paintings were given as national gifts for presidents of other countries, and I even held an art exhibition.

I joined Microsoft after Tsinghua and started my research career in artificial intelligence and computer vision. Within three years, I published 12 papers in top journals and conferences. My annual review was 4.5 out of 5, a record high score at Microsoft. Bill Gates met me in person and tried to persuade me to stay at Microsoft instead of going to MIT for a Ph.D.

I felt that people should like me because of my achievements. However, I encountered many relationship problems with the people close to me as I became arrogant and selfish, even to my parents, who sacrificed their lives to raise me. When my mother had surgery to treat diabetes, I didn't even go home to see her, using my job as an excuse. I justified myself: if I were not selfish, how could I excel in my studies and research?

I chose to leave Microsoft and came to MIT to pursue a Ph.D. in Computer Science. During an event at MIT, I met Pastor Caleb, who is now a missionary in Alaska. He invited me to come to the Bible study of ISM, where I met Pastor Joseph. The Bible studies taught by Pastor Joseph were challenging, yet I thought I didn't need God because God was only for the weak. Despite my lack of interest, Pastor Caleb persistently shared time with me every week, and Pastor Joseph conducted a one-on-one Bible study on the Book of John. I became intrigued by the loving relationships among Christians, which differed from what I had known.

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<sup>15</sup> Detailed background of the testifier has been excluded for personal privacy reasons. Testimony is included by permission of the testifier. This testimony was written on July 18, 2021.

Over time, studying the Word of God opened my eyes to see my sins. “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). All the relationship problems and my strong ego showed that I was a sinner. Being cut off from God, I was dead. Deep inside, I was wicked and corrupt, but I only cared about my outside image and used achievements to hide the ugliness of my soul. “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul” (Mark 8:36). It was not the recognition from the achievements that I needed but the unconditional love of God, which this world does not offer. Finally, realizing that I was a spiritual orphan, so wretched and pitiful despite all my achievements, I decided to follow Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

After I became a Christian, I received God's mercy and love beyond measure. I went through many personal ups and downs, and wherever I was, God was there with me through my spiritual parents, Pastor Joseph and Lydia, his wife. They had poured out their hearts to love me since I stepped into our church, even when I was too blind to see their love. I also received spiritual guidance from Pastor Paul Kim and his wife, Dr. Rebekah Kim. I lived with single brothers for five years to develop intimate Christ-centered relationships. God blessed me, and I got married and became a father. I also led a Bible study group on campus and had the privilege to share the Gospel with international graduate students. I was so blessed to be even used by God to lead some students to Christ.

Growing up as a Christian was much harder than I imagined. I thought that I was a good Christian as I served in the ministry and witnessed to the non-Christians. As the campus Bible study group began to grow in size, my pride grew out of control instead of being grateful to God. Deep in my heart, I gave credit to myself and thought that I was better than other leaders because

of the “results” in ministry. I was self-dependent, self-sufficient, and didn’t need anyone. I lived in self-deception, and my ego didn’t allow me to see the reality of who I was.

“For the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7b). Truly, God was not mocked by my superficial Christian life. Through multiple instances, God exposed many of my sin problems. Pastor Joseph helped me to see the consequences of my sins. Many brothers shared with me in tears the truth of who I was. Even my sheep told me that they were mistreated and had become leader conscious because of my bad temper. When I was blind to my sins, the Koinonia Cross relationships helped me see my true self, and that was the only way for such a stubborn sinner to repent and grow in Christ. God opened my eyes to see how my sins have hurt many precious people in my life.

A few years ago, my wife was suddenly diagnosed with stage-two aggressive cancer. I was shocked when I heard the news. Sorrow and doubts gripped me. “Oh, God, how can you allow such a thing to happen? How can our young child grow up without a mother?” Amazingly, the daily devotional text on the day of the cancer news was 2 Kings 5:1-14, where Naaman was miraculously healed of leprosy! It was comforting to know that God was going to help us. The family of God carried us through unceasing love and prayers. Many at church helped with babysitting and cooking. Dr. Rebekah led a 40-day fasting prayer chain across our churches worldwide for my wife and other health concerns. My wife underwent a series of treatments, including immunotherapy, chemo, and surgery. Amazingly, on the last day of the prayer chain, we heard that my wife was cancer-free! We could only praise God for His love and faithfulness!

I testify that I have tasted the abundant life Jesus promised despite being an unworthy sinner. But the abundant love I received was not free. Many have paid the price through much sacrifice and suffering. They gave up their ambition and comfortable life and devoted their lives

to reaching out to me and other international students, many of whom are arrogant, obnoxious, and ungrateful. The love and forgiveness that I received from my Redeemer, Jesus Christ, became real through the Word of God and the family of God.

Jason<sup>16</sup>

I was born in Korea and grew up as the oldest of two brothers. I had a smooth life until I was a junior in high school. My father's furniture business went bankrupt because his best friend didn't pay the money he borrowed from my father. Through this incident, I saw how cold this world could be. I became cynical and thought trusting others, even close friends, was not wise. Meanwhile, my mother opened a very small restaurant and worked tirelessly to support our family. I was determined to be successful for my parents' sake and, ultimately, for my sake. Eventually, I entered Korea University with a full scholarship. All my hard work and sacrifice paid off.

After completing the bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering and the mandatory military service, I prepared to attend graduate school in the U.S. Before I left for the U.S., my mother was diagnosed with terminal colon cancer and had only a few months left to live. Life seemed vulnerable, unpredictable, and, most of all, so unfair. My mother was a good person. She sacrificed so much for the family. Seeing her in great pain made it even harder for me to accept what was happening to her.

To encourage my mother, I hurriedly married my fiancé, Helen, and moved to Boston to start graduate school at Boston University. My mother quickly became frail and passed away. Life seemed meaningless to me. For the first time in my life, I started to earnestly seek the

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<sup>16</sup> Detailed background of the testifier has been excluded for personal privacy reasons. Testimony is included by permission of the testifier. This testimony was written on April 22, 2021.

meaning of life. My wife was already attending Antioch Baptist Church because she had started her Ph.D. at Boston College before our marriage. At church, I began studying the Bible, hoping that a religious life could help me overcome the grief from my mother's passing.

Several months later, I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior at the church retreat. Hearing the messages by Pastor Andy Pak, I was convinced that the sinfulness of the people in the Bible was no different from my own. I have been rejecting God as they have, although God gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for worthless sinners. I was touched by God's love for a sinner like me and chose to follow Jesus Christ.

After my decision, I tried hard to be a good Christian. Even though my behavior changed, my heart remained the same. Living a so-called religious life of serving in the ministry, I viewed myself as better than others and became prideful. Instead of becoming more humble, I became more arrogant. I easily argued with others in the church over petty matters and had difficulty accepting any suggestions. When my leaders, especially Pastor Joseph, shared my spiritual problems with me, I quickly became bitter and felt misunderstood. My occasional guilt led me to repent, but only superficially.

Several years ago, there was a powerful work of the Holy Spirit at our mission church in Armenia. Those who were Christians for a long time repented of their hidden sins, and the non-Christians chose to follow Jesus Christ. Listening to their testimonies prompted me to examine my life before God. Matthew 7:17-20 states that by its fruit, the tree can be known. I could not deny that my life was fruitless. My selfish life was evident by my Koinonia Cross being barren even though God had placed many brothers in Christ in my life. I did not trust anyone but myself. There was very little room in my heart to accept the opinions of others. I became easily

hot-tempered and hurt everyone in my life. People had to tip-toe around me because they feared my temper. Yet, my growing ego made me believe I was good and righteous.

Meanwhile, Pastor Joseph and my spiritual peers spent time with me to help diagnose my sin problems with the truth and challenged me to examine my life before God. Battling my ego was frightening, and it was like living in hell. Though I knew I needed to repent before God, repentance was difficult because I didn't want to accept the truth about who I was. Each time I tried to repent, I felt something holding me back, and my heart hardened.

It was clear that I was a slave like the demoniac in Mark 5:1-20. Just like the demoniac possessed by demons and thus controlled by them, anyone possessed by something – whether money, ambition, jealousy, or ego – will be controlled by it. I was possessed by my ego, which was under Satan's control. The demoniac was possessed by a legion of demons. My ego was so strong that no one could subdue me. No one could subdue the demoniac. I was alone, and everyone was avoiding me. The demoniac lived alone in the tombs, and everyone avoided him. It was hard to accept the truth about who I was. My ego constantly told me that I was not that bad, and it was not fair. I wanted to justify myself instead of accepting the truth and repenting.

But the more I resisted the truth, the more miserable I became. I began to see that I was really like the demoniac chained and possessed by my ego. I was hurting and destroying myself and the people around me. I thought I was free but was chained and bound again, just like the demoniac. But God allowed me to see that something was deadly wrong with me. If the Spirit of God is in me as a believer, why is it so hard to accept the truth? Though Christ came to give me life, I treated him as someone who made my life miserable.

When I had accepted the truth about myself, I could finally sense the power of God to free me from the slavery of sin. "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1). I wanted to

be freed by God. I broke down and cried out to God for his mercy in repenting for my sins that killed Jesus on the cross. When I shared my realization with Pastor Joseph, he prayed for me and for the undeniable work of the Spirit to lead me to the cross of Jesus. Meanwhile, I started a journey of apologizing to my fellow brothers one by one for mistreating them. They were all eager to forgive me.

After my repentance, I felt true joy and freedom, something I had never felt so deeply. Only in Jesus can there be true freedom! I know there still will be many difficult times ahead. But I do not have fear because the Lord is my shepherd, and he will never pass me by. God has placed my Koinonia Cross relationships to walk with me so that I will not fall away. I am certain that victory in Jesus is guaranteed when I die entirely to myself and depend on God because I will have the resurrection power of Jesus!

Jeremy<sup>17</sup>

Growing up in a communist country, I did not believe in God and was very ignorant about life. I had no intention of studying the Bible. I wanted to get my Ph.D. and return to China to make enough money. During my childhood, I witnessed many unfair things. My parents and relatives complained about the hardships. When I was four years old, my mother was forced to have an abortion because of the one-child policy. My father missed a promotion because he was betrayed by his “good friend” at work. My parents constantly told me I should never trust anyone, especially close friends.

Despite the difficulties, my parents sacrificed a lot to love and support me. I studied hard and entered Tsinghua University. I became very prideful and believed that I was better than

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<sup>17</sup> Detailed background of the testifier has been excluded for personal privacy reasons. Testimony is included by permission of the testifier. This testimony was written on September 2, 2022.

everyone else. But my life was without a clear direction, and I felt a deep emptiness in my heart. Thinking that achieving higher success was the only solution to life, I came to Boston University for a Ph.D. in Physics.

When I came to Boston, I left behind my father, who was terminally ill with cancer. He was diagnosed right before I graduated from Tsinghua. Immediately after graduation, I went to see him. To encourage him, I showed him my diploma. But I felt so helpless. My diploma was nothing but a piece of paper. Despite my father's illness, I came to Boston University. Within a month after I came to America, my father passed away. Sorrow and guilt filled me, but I had nowhere to turn. I had many questions about life but no answers. It was the lowest point of my life.

Around this time, I met Pastor Caleb at a Chinese market. He initiated and invited me to join the Bible study for the International Student Ministry (ISM) taught by Pastor Joseph and his wife, Lydia. For the first time, I heard about God's selfless love displayed through His Son, Jesus Christ. In the beginning, the stories in the Bible seemed nothing more than like fairy tales. But I was intrigued by the love of the Christians for me even though I had nothing to offer them. Their close relationships with one another drew me. It was so different from all the mistrust that I witnessed before.

Interestingly, the more I studied the Bible, the more convinced I was that the Bible was the truth. The Word of God opened my eyes to see my pride, jealousy, entitlement, and ungratefulness. I could not help but remember the relationship problems with my friends and how much I took my parents' love for granted. Also, my wife, whom I married right before coming to America, was able to join me, and my selfishness became even more evident in my relationship with her. I was a wretched sinner. Yet God chose to love me by sending His one and

only Son so that I could be saved from my sins. Being overwhelmed by the love of God, I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. Sometime after, by the grace of God, my wife also made the decision for Christ.

Deciding to become a Christian was the easy part. The hard part was to live out my life as a Christian. It took years for God to chisel away my ego. I was independent and self-centered, so growing close to the brothers in church and trusting my spiritual leader did not come easy. I preferred to keep a distance between myself and everyone else. The more efforts I made to get close to others, the more my sins became visible. Being nice to others made me feel good about myself, and at the same time, it gave me space to hide my real feelings and thoughts. As long as I could save face and appear as a good person, I was satisfied. But, the Word of God taught at my church, and with the help of Pastor Joseph, my sins did not remain hidden.

My biggest struggle over the years has been being humanistic. I took pride in the fact that I was nice to people. In reality, being humanistic is one of the worst kinds of sin. When I saw sins committed by my fellow brothers, I refused to do anything because of the fear of offending them. I wanted to protect my nice person image. At the core of being humanistic was my tolerance for sins. I did not see sin as sin, and this is the true meaning of evil. I was tolerating sin to save face. As a result, my heart became numb to sin. Not long ago, my son was caught for being sly and lying. I was shocked to see how naturally and frequently he twisted facts to get what he wanted and make himself feel good. How did he become this way? Many years of not seeing sin as sin gave my son the room to lie and deceive others. My sins were poisoning my children.

Furthermore, carrying a nice person image was a cover to hide inside of me all the sinfulness, such as pride, jealousy, and selfishness. I was trained to be a "three good student" in

China, which means good at morality, learning, and health. I cultivated myself to have a good person image on the outside so that people could praise me. I did not care about who I was inside because people could not see the inside of me. I became obsessed with saving face. Unless my inside is cleansed, everything I did, even in the name of serving God and loving others, did nothing but feed my ego and personal glory. So, I repented of all my sins and asked God for forgiveness. I committed to hating sin as much as God hates sin.

God has been blessing me through the family of God. Pastor Joseph and Lydia invited my family to move into the lower unit of their house. When we lived by ourselves, there was so much room to be selfish and hide our sins. Spending more time with my shepherds, we could learn to understand our problems from God's perspective. They also influenced our children because we have been too blind to see their sins.

Even my marriage was shaped by God's people around me. Coming from China, my wife and I grew up spoiled as only children. My mother-in-law was worried about our marriage when my wife moved to America. We fought a lot during the early years of marriage. My marriage would have been impossible without the help of the family of God, who made us see our sins and selfishness. God blessed us with two precious children. My parents-in-law were amazed by the fact that we were raising our children without any help from them. In China, most young couples heavily rely on their parents to raise their children. With the prayers of the family of God and persistently witnessing, my wife's mother and grandmother, both of whom were devout Buddhists, became Christians. Without the relationships in Christ that I received, none of these could have been possible.

When I remember the passing of my father, I wish that I had been with my father in his last days. Being so selfish at the time, I did not understand how desperately he must have wanted

to see me in the last hours of his life. As painful as it was, I give thanks to God because He turned a tragic moment into a source of blessing. My father's passing made me pursue the meaning of life. And it is a constant reminder of who I was before Jesus Christ saved me. Despite all my past failures, I am embraced by God and His family. I found my identity as a child of God and my purpose in life, which is to live a cross-bearing life and prepare for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

John<sup>18</sup>

I was born in the countryside in China. I was very good at studying from a young age and earned much praise. I studied hard and got into Tsinghua University. I wanted to be a valuable contributor to the society. But after witnessing the 1989 student uprising and corruption in society, my dream of an ideal society was shattered. Many of my classmates were going to the U.S. for PhD studies, so I followed them with the hope that the change of environment could bring me new motivation in life. I came to Boston University for my Ph.D. study.

I came to the ISM Bible study to learn about Christianity and better understand American culture. Unexpectedly, I was attracted by the friendly atmosphere. There was something different about the Christians as compared to the groups I have associated with before. Sharing and discussions replaced ego-centered arguments. Patience and encouragement replaced blame, especially while playing sports or other games after the Bible study. I thought that making friends with the nice people in that group would not be a bad thing for me, so I kept attending the Bible study.

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<sup>18</sup> Detailed background of the testifier has been excluded for personal privacy reasons. Testimony is included by permission of the testifier. This testimony was written on June 2, 2023.

Through the Bible study, I learned everyone is a sinner. The thought that I was also a sinner sounded very harsh to me. I thought I had done nothing wrong to violate the rules of this world. As time went by, I realized that God's standard for human beings is too high to reach and Jesus is too perfect to follow. God asked us to love our enemies, but hating our enemies has always been part of Chinese culture! Setting aside my biases, I focused on learning the Bible. I even tried to pray. Surprisingly, what the Bible says began to make sense to me. One day, I prayed and read from the book of John about Jesus washing his disciples' feet before he was about to die on the cross. I was touched to tears by his words as I read this passage. I clearly knew that the Bible was not a novel. This was concrete love: willing to serve and willing to die.

Belief in my own righteousness started to wane. Over time, I saw how prideful I was. My pride made me ignorant and caused broken relationships. It hindered me from being loved and saved by God. Therefore, after repenting for my sins, by God's grace, I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. I became a new creation through Jesus Christ. But my old nature did not go away easily, and I had to change a lot.

I was always self-righteous and saw myself as better than others. While growing up, I bossed around my younger brothers and did not respect them because I did much better academically. My pride made me think that I was the most "valuable" person to my parents because they were praised for my achievements. My pride carried over to Christian life. Unlike other Christians, I did not have too many struggles, so I naturally saw myself as a better Christian. The truth was that I was full of problems. My pride blinded me from seeing myself and all my sins, and it made me think I was good.

God not only saved me but also wanted me to grow spiritually through this family of God. At church, we learned about the Koinonia Cross relationships, the Christ-centered

relationships through knowing Him, loving Him, and serving Him. Knowing Him through studying the Word of God, loving and serving Him by loving one another, and building up relationships in the body of Christ, His church. I didn't have many struggles because I liked to listen to the Word of God but didn't have the urgency to practice it by building up Koinonia Cross relationships.

God put shepherds in my life to protect and guide me out of His love for me, but in the beginning, I was too proud to see and appreciate their love. Pastor Joseph has been taking care of me since I stepped into Antioch Baptist Church. Like a father, he loved me and wanted the best for me. However, in my pride and calculations, I didn't trust him because I thought he was not Chinese and didn't fully understand my background. I gave him a hard time, especially in the first few years. Instead of being bitter and frustrated with me, he poured out more of his love and heart to me. Later, when I could better understand his heart for me, he helped me to see myself deeper so that I could repent and be changed. He also challenged me to take care of my sheep with fatherly love instead of humanistic love.

My problems were evident from a lack of close relationships with my peers. I avoided close relationships because I was easily offended by people who shared the truth with me. I avoid shame by avoiding relationships. At the same time, I was critical and judgmental of others, so it was hard for others to build closer relationships with me. Also, if others were not close to me, then I would not have to waste my time and effort to love them back. My lack of relationships demonstrated my pride and selfishness. Jesus commanded me to love, yet I couldn't because I was not humble. Christians are commanded to love because we are first loved by God, and we love others in gratitude to God. The fact that I didn't love others showed that I did not

appreciate the love I had received. The truth was that I was not better but worse than everyone else.

Through many prayers and repentance, I came to experience Christ-centered relationships. Step by step, God made my Christian life more abundant and full. God brought many people into my life and has given me the chance to be a shepherd. Reaching out to non-Christians and caring for younger Christians helped me realize how much I have been loved and blessed. Many times, I have encountered resistance when I tried to help others see their sins. They only listen after having calculated in their own minds whether they will gain or lose something. Struggling to love them when it was difficult helped me to see how much I was difficult to love when my leaders reached out to me. Most of all, I could see how much I could not love another person. My love was minimal. I experienced my sins each time I did not want to suffer for another person. Yet, understanding how much I was loved by my leaders, I was motivated and inspired to love others as I was loved.

I cannot imagine how I would have turned out without God's protection and provision through the family of God and my Koinonia Cross relationships. From my relationship struggles with shepherds, peers, and even my wife, I realized more and more that I was a sinner. And I could see how hard it would be to love someone like me. The more God opened my eyes to help me see myself, the more I became humbled by the reality of my sins before God. I have come to a deeper understanding of God's heart as my Heavenly Father. I could appreciate better witnessing the changed hearts of my sheep as well.

Though I felt far from being ready to be in the mission field, I had the privilege to move to the overseas mission fields and committed to putting my trust in my Father in heaven, walking by faith and not by sight, and building up the Koinonia Cross relationships in the mission field

with gratitude and humility in Christ. Through communal life along with other missionary families, God revealed more and more that I am an impossible sinner so I can fight the spiritual battle through daily repentance. I needed my spiritual shepherd, Pastor Simon Kang, and the family of God to smooth out the sharp edges in my life.

Since then, I have moved to two different mission fields and forged new relationships while deepening the ones already in my Koinonia Cross. I now include Pastor Peter Lee and Pastor James Suh as my spiritual shepherds, along with many new spiritual peer relationships that I can depend on for my spiritual battles and walk with God. I am especially thankful to God for the opportunity to be together with Caleb, a brother with whom I began my Christian life 25 years ago. Each mission field location has been a God-given opportunity to build close relationships in Christ with the other missionaries. I came with two bags when I moved to the U.S. from China many years ago to attend graduate school. I left with two bags when I moved from the U.S. to the mission fields. But I am the wealthiest man in the world because God richly blessed me with many relationships in Christ.

Matthew<sup>19</sup>

Unlike the hard-working students in China, I grew up trying hard to excel in competitive basketball. Since the age of 12, I have spent countless hours practicing basketball. I was so obsessed with basketball that my neighbor even threatened to call the police because I wouldn't stop after midnight. My hard work paid off, and I became one of the best players in middle and high schools, receiving much attention and recognition. I thought that I was someone special. I even dreamed of becoming a professional player.

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<sup>19</sup> Detailed background of the testifier has been excluded for personal privacy reasons. Testimony is included by permission of the testifier. This testimony was written on September 11, 2023.

My dream was quickly shattered in my senior year of high school when I met professional youth players from the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA). They were gifted athletically and in skill. Seeing them, I knew I had a little chance of making it to the pros. Yet, I could not give up the sport because it was my identity and the source of significance. Basketball gave me the attention of others I craved. The thrill of success on the court often faded quickly, and emptiness filled my heart, yet I still could not walk away. In my sophomore year of college, basketball was taken away from me due to my knee injury and being diagnosed with flat feet. As hard as it was, I had no choice but to turn to academics. Since the best students around me went abroad to study, I did the same and chose to study at Northeastern University in Boston for a Ph.D.

A few months before starting at Northeastern, my father suddenly had a stroke and passed away within a couple of days. It was so sudden that I didn't even have a chance to talk to him. I saw him through the windows of the ICU (Intensive Care Unit) with tears in my eyes. I kept asking myself again and again, "Why me?" The sudden passing of my father caused the health of my grandparents to fail, and within two years, my paternal grandfather and maternal grandparents passed away. I can never forget the feeling that every few months, someone I love dies one after the other. I just couldn't understand why life treated my family and me so harshly. There was nothing that I could do, and I felt so helpless. I only have one life to live, but is studying hard worth it? Even if I could become the best of the best and have the power to conquer the entire world, I would have no power to stop death. And like what happened to my father and grandparents, I could also perish at any moment. What would happen to me after I die?

I came to Northeastern with a heavy heart and full of questions about the meaning of life. Shortly after my arrival, I was introduced to the ISM Bible study. Unlike the people I have known in the past, the Christians genuinely cared about me and had a passion for sharing the Gospel, even at the cost of their convenience, time, and money. I was used to people who were cruel, cold, and stingy. The sufferings I had faced made me think that life had no meaning because everyone would die. The Bible study taught me that life does not end in death, but God desires us to be saved and have eternal life in Jesus Christ, His Son. My sins have caused the separation between God and me, so God seemed so far away.

While I was studying the Bible, there were events in my life that allowed me to understand the Bible more clearly. After coming to Boston, I worked as a part-time journalist for a Chinese sports magazine to cover the Celtics. I attended most of the home games and interviewed the players. One of my assignments was to travel to New York and interview the USA Olympic basketball team. I interviewed Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, and other NBA stars who were members of the team. It is obvious that the more a person achieves, the bigger the ego grows and the more insecure he becomes. I became disappointed by them because they were full of pride, and because of money and fame, many players have a notoriously immoral lifestyle. It was obvious to me that they had no peace in their hearts.

What if I had achieved my dream of becoming a basketball star? Would I be any different from them? The answer was no. I remember when I was playing basketball in high school and college. I made derogatory comments towards players who were worse than me. I used to make fun of them. Despite my arrogance, I believed I was actually friendly and encouraging towards my teammates. Meanwhile, I was filled with envy and hatred towards the players better than me, including those who were my friends. I could not bear anyone receiving praise for playing well.

To save face, I maintained a fake nice person image in front of them. Since I came to Northeastern, I was the same in my research lab. I was as competitive as ever. When my lab mates' papers were accepted, and mine did not, I was so angry and bitter. Yet, I pretended to be happy for my lab mates.

It became apparent to me that my life was filled with sin, and I was the very reason why Jesus had to die. I was dead in my sins, being lost and separated from the living God. All I had was my sinful desires that followed the prince of the air, which is Satan. My whole life was about being disobedient to the righteous and holy God. So, I humbled myself before God, begged for His forgiveness, and surrendered my life to Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Becoming a Christian was not the end but a whole new beginning. Finally, I had a new start to live life \ the right way. The way that's pleasing to God, not to this world and its masters. In many ways, because of the passing of my father and grandparents, God opened my eyes to see the brevity and preciousness of life. Knowing that Jesus died for my sin and seeing the deadly consequences of sin, I can no longer cheapen my salvation. Being a Christian opened my eyes to seeing this world from God's perspective.

As any parent would agree, giving birth to a child is nothing compared to raising one. In the same way, the real challenge and hard work did not stop at salvation; rather, it began when I was born again. For an inveterate sinner like me, it truly takes the body of Christ for me to go through sanctification. Through the family of God, especially those in my Koinonia Cross relationships, I am continuously challenged to examine my life before God and corrected to live by God's perspective. These are the people who are willing to risk offending me. To them, having the right relationship with Christ for me is far more important than whether I like them or not. The only other person who would do this for me is my mother.

Since becoming a Christian, my church has become like my family. My leaders have become spiritual parents and peers, my brothers. Pastor Joseph and Lydia, along with Pastor Paul Kim and Dr. Rebekah Kim, have been guiding me with the Word of God and parental love so that I will be ready for the day when Jesus returns. Being a shepherd to sheep has made me grow in Christ more than expected. Much like how parenting my children helped me to appreciate my parents' sacrifice for me, ministering to sheep has made me realize how much love I received from my spiritual leaders and, ultimately, from my Heavenly Father. Also, I found that leading others is only possible if I desire to be sanctified. Otherwise, it is like the blind leading the blind. And I must also love the sheep more than myself. God enabled me to see my true self, a person who is selfish, carefree, nonchalant about life, and lacks trust in people.

Perhaps the greatest blessing from becoming a Christian was my mother's salvation. She had suffered so much, especially when my father and grandparents all passed away in a short time. She no longer has to wonder about the meaninglessness of life. I am grateful to God that my mother and I can be together forever in heaven one day. Witnessing how much God blesses and cares for those who only live for Him, I can seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness without any reservations. God's vision for me is to love my Heavenly Father by loving His people and commit to being broken daily through His Word.

Samuel<sup>20</sup>

I was born in a very small town in China. I was taught to study hard so I could go to a good university and eventually find a good job. My parents believed in God, and they read the Bible and prayed every day. They also asked me to read the Bible with them and pray together. I

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<sup>20</sup> Detailed background of the testifier has been excluded for personal privacy reasons. Testimony is included by permission of the testifier. This testimony was written on July 12, 2022.

believed in God's existence and that God created the world, even though everyone in China was taught that there was no God. I did not understand the concept of sin or salvation, and God was not personal to me. In my mind, God was a supernatural being from heaven who protected me and blessed my life.

I studied very hard and was admitted to the Ph.D. program at Northeastern University. My parents and I believed that God gave me this opportunity. When I moved to Boston, I looked for a Christian group to receive help and learn English, and through a friend, I found Antioch Baptist Church. At the time, I was completely blind to my selfishness. The other brothers complained a lot about me, and after I married my wife, my egotistical nature brought her to tears. Still, I thought I deserved more from them and blamed them for their complaints.

When I finished my Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering, I could not find a job. I wanted to go back to China, but my wife was admitted to the Ph.D. program at Tufts University. I put off my plan to return to China and worked at Chinese restaurants until I found a job in my major. I thought I could easily handle working at a Chinese restaurant because I had a Ph.D. However, I was fired from my first restaurant job because the boss was not happy with my work. At another restaurant, I was wronged by customers who refused to give me tips after I delivered their orders in rain and snow. From my suffering, I realized how much I had taken the love of the family of God for granted. Unlike the restaurant owners and customers who did not appreciate my best efforts and hard work, the brothers and sisters in Christ at church embraced me unconditionally.

Suffering helped me to see my problem, which was selfishness. I was too selfish to see how much I had hurt those around me, especially my wife and the closest brothers in Christ. It became clear that I never knew God. Just because I grew up in a Christian home and learned about God did not automatically make me a Christian. I had never repented for my sins nor

committed myself to follow Jesus. On one Sunday, when I heard a message from John 10 and was asked by the preacher whether I was a sheep belonging to Jesus, I knew I was not. At that moment, I was compelled to respond and could not stop crying. I understood my sins before Jesus and repented to accept him as my Lord and Savior.

Shortly after, I followed Pastor Joseph's suggestion and returned to Northeastern University to obtain a master's degree in computer systems. Amazingly, I was able to obtain a software programming job even before I finished the degree. My wife completed her Ph.D. and was also able to find a job. God blessed our decision to remain in Boston because we needed this church. God knew how much my wife and I needed to be transformed. God helped me grow in Christ continuously because my selfishness did not go away so easily.

As time passed, I found myself burdened when serving God and caring for others became too costly in time and money. I did not serve as much as others, but I still grumbled and complained. When some in the church volunteered to go out as missionaries, I asked myself whether I could do the same. My answer was no. I desired a comfortable life and did not want to suffer for Christ. When I examined myself, what I loved most was money. Saving money has always been my top priority. My brain was so adept at calculating how much money I would save or waste.

Naturally, my love for God waned over time, and I spent less time praying and studying the Word of God. I tried to serve two masters, but as Jesus said, I ended up loving one and hating the other. My relationship with God suffered because I loved money too much. My selfishness was evident in my barren Koinonia Cross relationships. I was not close to anyone and enjoyed the safety of being alone. Even though I served as staff and taught the Bible, my life did not bear any fruit. No one respected me because my life did not reflect what I was teaching.

I witnessed many brothers and sisters confessing their sins and repenting to restore their relationship with God and become free. With the help of Pastor Joseph and the brothers, I reevaluated my life. They helped me to see what I refused to see for myself. My heart was idolatrous, and I was slowly returning to my old, self-centered way of life. Yet, because I cared to save face, I heartlessly served out of obligation and tried to do as much as the other staff members. I could not go on like this forever. God was speaking to me through the messages at church and through His people that I needed to change and live for Jesus only.

Two messages taught by Dr. Rebekah Kim helped me to gain a new perspective on my relationship with God. From Philippians 2:12, she shared that Christian life involves working out our salvation every day. She also taught from 1 John 5:3 that when we love God, keeping His commandments is not burdensome. I had felt my relationship with God was a duty because I did not have the desire to love Him. Living out my salvation every day was burdensome to me. After hearing these messages, I began to feel sorry that God sacrificed His Son for me and blessed my life with all that I needed. God gave me all that I had, but I acted as if I was the one who obtained them. God made it abundantly clear who I was and that the only choice for me was to repent for my sins and return to God, knowing that He is all that I need.

After my repentance, the reality of spiritual warfare became more vivid. I could see Satan constantly attacking me and wanting me to return to my old life. I have to fight against my old nature constantly, and it is true that I must work out my salvation every day. I am thankful for my Koinonia Cross relationships that keep me accountable so that I do not fall for all kinds of temptations. Whenever I see my daughter's stubbornness and pride, I see she inherited these characteristics from me, much like I inherited Adam's sinfulness. I can see more vividly how my sins are affecting God when I see my child resisting my discipline. A selfish life is a cursed life.

It gave me the illusion that I was free and in control, but in reality, it enslaved me. Though it is hard and requires much sacrifice, loving God and His people is the most worthy life and it is where I can find true freedom.

Stephen<sup>21</sup>

I always tried hard to be accepted by people. Despite my outstanding achievements, I constantly felt insecure and needed to achieve more to feel accepted. I studied hard and entered Tsinghua University, but although it is one of the top universities in China, I did not feel content. Thus, I transferred to Brown University, where I received a bachelor's degree in mathematics. My hard work led me to study at MIT for a Ph.D.

My academic success was the envy of my friends, but the anxieties and emptiness in my heart never disappeared. I searched through many books to find answers to the meaning of life. I read books on philosophy and religion, yet these books left me unsatisfied and made me wonder if the truth existed. The lowest point in my life was when my father shared that my grandmother passed away. He told me after the burial. My grandmother raised me when I was a child. The reality of death reminded me that I would lose everything when I died, and life seemed even more meaningless.

During my first year at MIT, I met Christopher, who had graduated from my group. He introduced me to the Bible study for international students at Antioch Baptist Church, taught by Pastor Joseph. I started to attend the Bible study, but I doubted that the Bible was the only truth. A few months later, I met Dr. Rebekah Kim at her house, where we gathered to celebrate the Chinese New Year. I confidently told her the doubts about Jesus being the only way based on my

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<sup>21</sup> Detailed background of the testifier has been excluded for personal privacy reasons. Testimony is included by permission of the testifier. This testimony was written on September 7, 2023.

“extensive” search. Instead of arguing back, she suggested I study the Bible more carefully and prayed for me. I was impressed because she had been a Christian for more than forty years and concretely followed God. She and her husband, Pastor Paul Kim, founded many churches and surrounded themselves with rich relationships. Compared to her, I was a loner and only gave empty words. Realizing my shallowness and arrogance, I started to take the Bible more seriously. On top of attending the weekly Bible study regularly, I also met with Christopher for one-on-one Bible study lessons.

The Bible studies answered many of my essential questions about life. Also, the fruit of the believers in the form of transformed lives proved the existence of God. Those who follow Jesus no longer live selfishly but strive to love one another as Christ has loved them. Though the reality of God made sense, my sins that the Bible revealed were hard to accept. It was my pride that kept me from acknowledging how sinful I was.

At the core, my problem was ego. I carefully crafted my image as a good person, but my heart was full of sin. I was jealous of those who were better than me, while I tried to be their friend so that I could use them. When others failed, I rejoiced, but I pretended to be sad for them. I could not love even those who sacrificed so much for me, including my parents. They sold their apartment to pay for my college tuition, yet I treated my weekly chats with them like a difficult chore. When it came to spending time for myself, there was no limit. Yet, for my parents, I became extremely time conscious.

All the truths about my sins were undeniable, and I needed Jesus to save me. So, I decided to become a Christian. I was excited about my new life. Yet, I had trouble feeling free, like how the Bible promised. Instead, I was paranoid about saving face. I volunteered to serve and listened well to others, especially to the leaders. I was preoccupied with keeping a good

image as a Christian. As a result, I lied to cover up my mistakes and sins and looked down on those who served less than I did. I was easily offended by those who shared with me about my sins and lamented over not being better. My solution was not repentance but improving my behavior to appear as a better Christian. Everything became so burdensome. There was no freedom that Jesus promised in John 8:32.

Thankfully, God used His Word and the family of God to expose my core sins. Through Dr. Rebekah Kim's retreat message, I realized that I did not build my life on the foundation of the Word of Jesus as in Matthew 7:24-27. I devised my behavior based on how others would view me rather than genuinely obeying the Word of God. Also, Pastor Joseph and the brothers helped me see what was obvious to them but not to me. They were able to see my hidden sins. I lived in the manner described by Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 because I had the appearance of godliness, but my hidden sins were many. God cares about what is in my heart rather than my behavior. I was living like a thief. As long as I did not get caught, I believed myself to be a good person. Before, I wanted to impress people with my academic achievements. Now, I wanted to impress the people around me by acting righteously. My goal in life was to gain recognition one way or another. The bottom line was that my ego needed to be broken.

Thank God for His mercy and determination to rescue me from living a life of lies. God exposed my sins through several incidents, and I could no longer find any excuses to hide myself. Around that time, I heard Dr. Rebekah Kim's timely message on "Christian culture," which described how many people lived using the appearance of a Christian life as a cover-up for unrepentant sins. I had been working hard to change my outward behavior and image while my inner self never changed. Later, under Pastor Joseph's guidance, I began to understand my survival mentality, lying, and problems of saving face. I painfully realized how my ego had

distorted my heart, and I was living a double life. Instead of being humbled by the truth and asking for God's forgiveness, I became paranoid about the shame of discovering my true self. I lived as a slave and was not free.

Despite the stronghold of my sins, I'm thankful that God and His people did not give up on me. I can find true freedom only in the forgiveness of my sins through Jesus Christ. I went back to study the Bible with the basic questions like: "What is my life about?" 1 Peter 1:24-25, "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." For my entire life, I would rather have died than lose face. But does it really matter? I remembered the sorrow of losing my grandmother and the desire for eternal relationships. The true blessing is not maintaining a perfect image before men but recognizing myself as a sinner before God. Romans 5:8, "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

I always felt pressured to prove myself to others, and it was the same at church. But the fact was that there was nothing good in me, and the true blessing was to be forgiven by God. Despite my failures and ugliness, Jesus loved and willingly died for me. Like the tax collector in Luke 18:13, I cried out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" After almost a year of struggling to see the reality of myself, I repented for my ego and decided to be a genuine disciple of Jesus. Finally, I had unloaded a considerable burden in my heart, and I no longer needed to hide, knowing that nothing would be able to separate me from His love.

I am overwhelmed by God's sovereignty and faithfulness for a sinner like me. I could have been living with the belief that I was a good Christian and righteous person while my heart was rotten and full of sin. God used my precious relationships in Christ to help me see myself

and repent for my sins. I am thankful to the family of God for teaching and showing me that I can experience the glory of God and His victory when I repent for my sins.

Timothy<sup>22</sup>

I came to MIT to begin my Ph.D. program and was excited and hopeful about my future. At the same time, I was anxious and felt so empty in my heart. I was living my dream and finally reached the school where I wanted to study. Yet, I was so lost. Before MIT, I attended the University of Wisconsin for my undergrad. I was unhappy because I wanted to study at MIT. I was determined to enter MIT as a graduate student. I studied every course very diligently and double majored. I also did research with a professor because good grades alone would not get me into MIT. I considered anything a waste if it did not help me get into MIT. During the summer breaks, I only studied when I visited my parents in China. One of my best friends suggested that I should consider reading the Bible, but I thought the Bible was for losers. I was extremely excited and proud when I got the admission letter from MIT. I was never as thrilled before, and I shared the news with everyone I knew. Everyone told me that my life was all set.

Shortly after I came to MIT, I met a group of Christians from ISM and attended their Bible study. I went for free food and wanted to make new friends. During the Bible study, life was described as a race that no one knew why they were running and what was waiting for them at the finish line. It was such a realistic depiction of my life. My life before MIT was quite simple. It was a race on a single track with only one goal. I grew up in a well-off family. My parents and grandparents took care of everything for me, so my only duty was studying well. My family taught me just one standard by which I was measured - the name of the school I entered

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<sup>22</sup> Detailed background of the testifier has been excluded for personal privacy reasons. Testimony is included by permission of the testifier. This testimony was written on September 20, 2023.

and my ranking. No one explained to me what the purpose of my life was. Am I to be better than others so that I can boast?

As I was intrigued by what the Bible taught, I attended regularly. According to Mark 8:36, my soul was worth more than the whole world. If I had achieved all I wished, which would only be a tiny portion of the world, would it be worth it? And the journey of working hard was filled with emptiness. No matter how many papers I published or succeeded in my research, the thrill would only last briefly. The satisfaction was only temporary. And my ambition was endless. I was not the best or smartest student in high school. I should be content to study at MIT. However, as soon as I stepped into MIT, I wanted more. After one year of studying the Bible and realizing that life is meaningless without God, I became a Christian.

My new life in Christ was an invitation by God to transform me because the real struggles started with salvation. Luke 9:23 states that I must deny myself and take up my cross daily. What is my cross? Moreover, how do I deny myself? I was proud of what I could do for church and ministry. Was I not a good Christian?

Meanwhile, my ego was easily hurt. I complained when I had to sacrifice for one of the brother-in-Christ. I had numerous hidden sins and evil thoughts. The driving force of my life was to perform well so I could look good. I did not want people to find out who I truly was. I was like what Jesus described in John 3:19-20 because I loved the darkness. The light would expose my sins and make me feel ashamed.

At the retreat during a summer mission trip, Dr. Rebekah Kim taught from Genesis 3. She spoke about L-E-A-F, which stands for Lust, Education, Appearance, and Finance. Much like Adam and Eve, who used fig leaves to cover their shame after sinning, we use LEAF to cover our sin and shame. I could not deny she described my life. The Bible was so accurate. Lust was

often in my heart. Education was my idol because I worshipped MIT. Appearance was something I worked hard to improve by trying to appear as a good Christian. Finance was for my love of money, as I was stingy even though God blessed me so much.

Dr. Rebekah Kim also mentioned the adulterous woman in John 8. The difference between this adulterous woman and me was that her sins were exposed while mine remained hidden because I was good at living a double life. Through the messages, I could see God's love for me through His Son, Jesus Christ, and I repented for all my sins. All the truths that Pastor Joseph and Christopher, my spiritual shepherds, had shared with me before were made clear through the Word of God.

Christian life has not been easy, not because it is supposed to be so hard, but because I made it hard by resisting God. When I think about the blessings in my life, I cannot understand why I have fought against God so much. To those who love God, He blesses abundantly. Among the many blessings I received from God, none has been more important than the salvation of my family members. By God's grace, my wife became a Christian. Answering the prayers of the entire church, my grandfather accepted Jesus Christ right before he died of colon cancer. My grandfather was an accomplished engineer and a very arrogant and self-reliant man. God granted me to see him before he passed away so that I could witness to him, and he gave his life to Christ. A year later, my mother also repented and accepted Christ, which was later followed by my grandmother. I am such a debtor of God's love.

God has also enriched my life with the Koinonia Cross relationships. They have shared with me every significant moment in my life since I became a Christian and have been walking the journey of faith with me. I am genuinely thankful to Pastor Paul and Dr. Rebekah Kim for founding our church 43 years ago so that I can have a spiritual home and be nourished by the

Word of God they have taught. I am also thankful to Pastor Joseph and Lydia for their teaching and counseling, along with Christopher for guiding me to be closer to Jesus. God has blessed me with my wife, a partner in serving God, and a healthy child through whom I can understand God's heart for me. I am grateful to God for all my spiritual peers who are my friends for life. I am forever indebted to God for saving me and giving me a new and abundant life.

## CHAPTER 5: OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

### FINAL THOUGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I return to the same question mentioned in Chapter 2: What is the church? The answer to this question defines Christian life. It is my hope that this thesis-project will provide some of the answers to this all-important question. To accomplish this aim, I wrote these pages as an eyewitness to the Koinonia Cross model, the impact it has had in the lives of the members of ISM at Antioch Baptist Church, and how the model has helped them undergo the process of sanctification. The premise of this thesis-project is that the aim of each church must be to sanctify its members.

The purpose of sanctification does not lie solely in living righteously as Christians. It prepares us for the return of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the purpose of the church is to prepare the body of Christ for the return of Jesus Christ through the effort of sanctifying the members of the church; this is the primary reason God established the church. Sanctification takes place in the church when the Word of God is obeyed faithfully, and the evidence of faithful obedience is found in the love the members hold for one another. All these are what the Koinonia Cross model aims to achieve. In the close-knit and loving relationships defined by the model, sins, especially those well-hidden, can be uncovered.

The need for sanctification or the importance of loving one another as Christians is undeniable. However, these necessary concepts are powerless unless put into practice; this is where the Koinonia Cross model proves relevant and effective. The model provides clear and specific guidance on loving one another in the church, delineating whom and how to love. It also provides theological reasons for why the relationships defined by the model are pertinent to

maturing as Christians. In essence, the Koinonia Cross model is a blueprint for the relationships formed within Christian life.

The fruit of the Koinonia Cross borne in the lives of the ISM members is still a work in progress. Even so, it provides a comprehensive glimpse into the work of God that can be accomplished when the model is lived out. This study presents evidence of the necessity of relationships in Christ in attaining the sanctification of the body of Christ through the Koinonia Cross model.

## **Realizations**

The following are my realizations gained from the efforts made in writing this thesis-project and many years of serving God as a Christian. My experiences of doing the utmost to live out the Koinonia Cross model for much of my Christian life and guiding others to do the same have taught me valuable lessons about ministry. Some of these realizations have been mentioned in earlier chapters of this thesis-project, but I would like to elaborate upon them further in this section.

### **Discipleship and Koinonia Cross Model**

Sanctification lies at the heart of Christian life, so it must be the focus of discipleship. The entirety of Christian life can be summarized as the sanctification stage. Its end goal is to make one holy and without blemish, prepared as a pure bride for the bridegroom Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:27). God prefers holiness over great acts of sacrifice or service (1 Samuel 15:22). Serving God may depend on how God chooses to use His servants and the gifts He bestows upon them. However, God's primary objective is to make us become more like His Son.

While it is hard to measure sanctification quantitatively, it is important to constantly examine our growth in our relationships with God and others. Without proper assessment, one's Christian life is left to relative and personal standards, leading easily to self-righteousness or ambiguity. The inability to measure progress can be conducive to merely the imitation of sanctification through superficial change without inner transformation. Spiritual failures, or sins, go unnoticed. Thus, it is imperative that discipleship programs work to measure the progress of each disciple's Christian life.

The Koinonia Cross model and discipleship are one and the same. As explained in earlier chapters, the Koinonia Cross model provides a sound system of diagnostic measurement for Christian life and a concrete plan of action for improvement. Because the evidence of sanctification lies in the relationships a Christian has in the church, the strengths and weaknesses of the four sides of the Koinonia Cross model accurately depict his spiritual condition. Genuine relationships in Christ lead to sanctification and, as a result, a closer relationship with God.

Christians need each other because it is nearly impossible to become spiritual and to grow in Christ on our own. Every Christian is a sinner and wrestles with fleshly desires. The old nature persists even though a new life in Christ has begun. And every Christian needs each other for sanctification. It is too easy for one to misguide himself without anyone to help him in his walk with God. Becoming a Christian does not provide automatic immunity to sin, but it is merely the start of a lifelong process of sanctification. Thus, discipleships should form relationships that hold one another accountable for protecting each other from temptation to sin.

As previously stated, the vast majority is likely to produce only the form of righteousness when left alone to grow spiritually. Human's prideful nature induces him to hide sin out of shame and to avoid the confession of sins and repentance; it is easiest to hide one's sin when

living in isolation. Thus, maturity in Christ does not call for independence from and less need of others but for the exact opposite. Spiritual maturity prompts us to recognize our vulnerability as sinners and our increasing need for God and His people. The longer one is a Christian, the more he understands his need for the church and the relationships formed with the body of Christ.

I conclude that the Koinonia Cross model is a discipleship model; they are the same. The Koinonia Cross model accomplishes the goals of discipleship in providing the basis for learning the Word, living out the Word, and measuring the progress of spiritual growth. Therefore, empirically speaking, it is possible to conclude further that the Koinonia Cross model is tantamount to Christian life.

### Impact of Culture

What is the extent to which one's cultural background influences his relationship with God? Many books have been written about the significant impact of cultural background and upbringing on one's perception of God, especially relating to evangelism to international students. However, not many are written about the discipleship of international students and do not explore deeply into the impact cultures have on their personal relationship with God.

This thesis-project delves into the subject of discipling international students, but it goes without saying that there is still a wealth of knowledge and information that remains untouched regarding this subject. The need for this information will only grow as ministry to international students in the U.S., along with the need for discipleship, continues to expand and grow. The twenty-five years of ISM experience held by Antioch Baptist Church contains myriads of difficulties and challenges that have provided ample opportunities to learn about human nature as sinners and this ministry in general.

This thesis-project focuses on the observation of Asians in ISM at Antioch Baptist Church, the vast majority of whom are Chinese. I reiterate here that no cultural group is more sinful than another; no cultural group is more prone to sin than another. All humanity is equally inherently sinful. Nevertheless, the effects of cultural background on one's relationship with God are unavoidable, along with its effects on the actions induced by one's sinful nature. This thesis-project examines these impacts and attempts to understand facets of cultural identity through an exploration of cultural tendencies and the historical circumstances that have produced a certain culture.

Asians have faced a history of war and poverty, along with victimization to years of injustice and corruption. This contentious history has fostered a culture of general mistrust. Mistrust kindles a spirit of independence and isolation, both of which engender a survival mentality, a predilection for saving face, and lying. These three characteristics have proved common to many of the Asian international students I have observed in the years of ISM and have hindered them from knowing God and growing in Christ.

Christians must evaluate all things from a spiritual perspective, which allows us to understand that even cultural characteristics can be byproducts of an issue of the heart. Studying and resolving such cultural tendencies are inextricable from studying and resolving matters of the heart. Godless societies, such as those prevalent in Asia, encourage self-worship – ultimately, the worship of ego. As God created humans to worship Him, self-worship only fosters fear and insecurity. When one's purpose in life becomes the preservation of his ego, he has little choice but to have a survival mentality, a desire to save face, and a propensity to lie. Though these are traits common to all sinners, they are most pronounced in those whose cultures have deeply instilled these habits in them – such as those from Asian cultures found in ISM.

Fear and insecurity engender mistrust, skepticism, and irrationality – all of which prevent one from readily accepting the love of God. The paranoia that stems from fear leaves one with little room to reason or think. It brings one to place more authority on his own human instincts or the desires of his flesh rather than on reason. The truth is reasonable and logical, and fear and insecurity prevent one from grasping the truth. As explained in 2 Corinthians, it is the work of Satan that keeps people in fear so that they cannot recognize and accept the truth. “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4). In ISM, I have often found that many attempt to follow God blindly without a clear conviction from fully understanding and embracing the truth.

Referring to his own times, Apostle John warned that the spirit of the antichrist was already in the world (1 John 4:3). The spirit of the antichrist leads people to live by the flesh in fear and insecurity so that they will blindly follow the antichrist when he comes. The spirit of the antichrist is none other than the evil spirit, and it is preparing the world for the arrival of the antichrist. It receives great help from the world’s ideologies, government authorities, social movements, and societal values that also encourage humans to be enslaved by their fears and insecurities.

The consequences of such are immense, as I have observed in ISM, the extent to which fear and insecurity are fostered by one’s ego. It is challenging to comprehend the level of paranoia that arises from the fear of losing face, and I have witnessed students become blinded by an unhealthy fixation on saving face. These students, many Chinese, come from cultures that encourage such excessive self-preservation.

The Chinese students I have encountered have also recognized each other as thick-skinned or shameless and have shared many almost humorous examples of shameless behaviors they witnessed back home in China. Yet, the self-preserving effort to avoid shame is counterintuitive when performed to such unreasonable extents. How could one act shamelessly in order to avoid shame? When a godless culture's relative, ever-changing moral compass guides its people, it is easy to ascribe logic to inconsistency. Building a survival mentality becomes the norm, driving people to do whatever it takes to appear perfect in their own eyes. Often, the desire to save face arises not to uphold honor or moral principles but for the sake of self-aggrandizement and vanity. Furthermore, saving face and building a survival mentality beget habits of lying.

All that I have described pertains to Christians. Even after salvation, an honest assessment of oneself and self-awareness are required to set free those who are enslaved by sin. Calloused by years of living in godless societies, sinners become irrational and blind to the truth. As a result, the Gospel is the only hope. In 1 John, Apostle John writes, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). He also writes about the cause of fear, "for fear has to do with punishment" (1 John 4:18). The fear of shame is common to all humans. It is, therefore, vital to recognize its root and cause; shame stems from sin and separation from God. Accordingly, God took action by casting out the ultimate source of fear – sin. The blood shed on the cross by Jesus bore forgiveness, and God took away our sins and, accordingly, our shame. As written in the Psalms, "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). Only the unconditional love of Christ can wipe away the shame of sin, and this same love is experienced in the church in the presence of godly love for one another.

## Study of the Past

My attempts to fully expound upon the Koinonia Cross model in this thesis-project do not capture its full extent and depth, given the scope of the research. Understanding the full depth of the Koinonia Cross model requires not only its implementation but also an understanding of the long history of God's people who have understood the sacrificial love of Christ. In essence, the roots of the model extend back to those who walked with God well before I started. I cannot stress enough the importance of understanding history; it continuously humbles me because I would not have obtained what I have now without those who came before me. My personal relationship with God was not borne in a vacuum but involved the people of God, specifically those at Antioch Baptist Church. Antioch Baptist Church stands on the shoulders and history of God's people who suffered for the sake of Christ.

Therefore, the study of the Koinonia Cross model is the study of the church. The church is built on the sacrifices of many men and women of faith who helped build the church for the next generation of Christians, as Ephesians 2:19-22 explains,

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

The church is standing on “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). It is built on those “in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:21). Regarding all who came afterward, Apostle Peter describes, “you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5).

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:19-22.

Countless living stones make up the history of the church. We studied many of these living stones at Antioch Baptist Church – Adoniram and Anne Judson, Samuel Pollard, Margaret Emma Barber, Watchman Nee, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Rev. Son Yang Won. Most recently, we studied the history and faith of William Bradford and the Pilgrims, who, searching for a land to worship God freely, made the dangerous voyage to settle in America in 1620. These and countless other men and women of faith have become the living stones placed on each other so that the churches can stand firmly on top of them today.

Like the pioneers of other churches with a lengthy history and legacy, the living stones of Antioch Baptist Church have formed building blocks that its members stand directly on. The founders of the church, Paul and Rebekah Kim, taught the Word of God uncompromisingly and loved with the grace and truth of His Word. Rebekah Kim's mother, Grandmother Ho Re, a founding member of the church, cooked tirelessly for those who came to church – though they ate more than they appreciated. Those who remained since joining the church in its early days became pillars who paved the way for others who committed to God after them. These living stones strove to live out Luke 9:23, referred to as the calling to a cross-bearing life. It is a life of sacrifice and suffering, which is the cost of loving others for the sake of Christ.

In understanding what makes a church a family of God, it is necessary to study those who demonstrated Christ's love and helped the faith of people who came to the church after them. The concept of the church as a family, which came from the command to love one another, allowed the members of Antioch Baptist Church to understand and embrace the Koinonia Cross model more easily and readily. For the past 30 years, God has used all the living stones of Antioch Baptist Church to teach and mold me into someone who can testify to the power and strength of the Koinonia Cross model.

## The Endgame

Endgame is the final stage of a game, or “the final stages of some action or process.”<sup>2</sup>

Game masters understand well that the endgame often determines the outcome of the game.

There is a recreational card game I enjoy called *Tichu*.<sup>3</sup> It is a shedding card game derived from a Chinese game called *duo-dizhu* and is played in rounds until one team reaches 1,000 points. The game is similar to Hearts or Spades and requires careful strategizing to win. The most successful players of this game win by carefully playing the last set of cards remaining in their hands. In other words, they are best at the endgame. Experienced card players understand that the endgame is not devised at the end of the game but at the beginning. It is devised when a fresh set of cards is dealt and revised until your last few remaining turns; the most successful endgame requires meticulous planning from the very beginning. This simple rule applies also to life. We must plan for the endgame in life, not when we are near our life’s end, but as early as possible.

In his self-help book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey lists the habit “begin with the end in mind” as number two of seven habits found in successful people he examined.<sup>4</sup> He explains that the end goal must be one’s “frame of reference” when doing anything in life.<sup>5</sup> In my opinion, this habit should be listed as the first; it is the most important of the seven habits. Unfortunately, this intuitive piece of wisdom is often ignored. Whether playing games, completing projects at work, or planning one’s life, the end goal must always be in focus.

The end for Christians is clearly outlined in the Scriptures as the return of Jesus Christ, the second coming of the Lord. Apostle Paul clearly describes this end in 2 Corinthians, “For we

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<sup>2</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “endgame,” accessed January 11, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/endgame>.

<sup>3</sup> Fata Morgana, “Tichu,” accessed January 11, 2024, <https://urs.fatamorgana.ch/tichu.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (New York, NY: RosettaBooks, 2013. Kindle Edition), 104-105.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, 105.

must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Each believer will receive judgment by Jesus Christ. Revelation 22:20, the second to last verse before the final greeting, reminds us that Jesus will return soon. Accordingly, we must plan, prioritize, and live in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ and the judgment of all believers that will follow. Our end game must consist of sanctification as a pure bride of Christ eagerly awaiting the return of the Bridegroom. Thus, preparing for the end means to be sanctified each day. We can presume that the day of our Lord’s return will be most joyous for those best prepared.

In Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus uses the Parable of the Ten Virgins to portray an image of proper preparation for the return of the Bridegroom. He compares two types of virgins – foolish and wise – waiting for the bridegroom, “For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps” (Matthew 25:3-4). The virgins differed in their preparation. While the wise virgins were ready for his return, the foolish virgins were ill-prepared. In this parable, the differing reactions of the bridegroom to the wise and foolish virgins reflect the seriousness of the state of their preparation; the bridegroom did not allow the foolish virgins to take part in the marriage feast (Matthew 25:10-13). On the other hand, the wise virgins were prepared for the endgame and could join him in the feast.

The imminent return of Jesus gives me the urgency to write about the Koinonia Cross model, which has borne the fruit of sanctification for those in ISM. It has served as the means to live out the commandments of God for all of Antioch Baptist Church and gave us the motivation to partake in the race of Christian life, which we must run to obtain the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24). We must keep running with the end in mind.

## **My Final Thoughts**

This thesis-project has provided me with the opportunity to understand better the Koinonia Cross model, its theology, and its practice. As I finish the last section, I am even more convinced that this model reflects the theology and image of the church, the body of Christ. The Koinonia Cross model is not only biblical but also a practical representation of how to live as Christians. I am grateful for the opportunity to delve into this topic because it gave me a deeper appreciation of the Koinonia Cross model.

I examined this topic as an insider and not as an independent observer who is unfamiliar with the Koinonia Cross model. I did my best not to interpret the research data with bias. An insider can have insights and understanding into a subject that an outsider may not be able to obtain quickly. However, it would have been noteworthy to utilize an outsider or even several outsiders to evaluate the effectiveness of the model. Finding qualified individuals to conduct the research would be a challenge. But, if it could be done, the findings from such effort would be worthwhile.

I write this thesis-project as an eyewitness of the Koinonia Cross model taught and lived out at the church I have been a member of for the past thirty years. A good researcher must follow where the data leads. I have written my thesis-project according to where the data has led me. The most relevant data is the lives that changed due to the Koinonia Cross model. And the changed lives gave me the motivation to study this subject and examine more deeply how lives were transformed. I cannot express enough the gratification I am experiencing as I write the final words of this thesis-project. Not because I am near completion but for the genuine delight from a more profound conviction that what I have known and believed is biblical.

Lastly, I wish to give God the glory for what took place during my thesis writing. A year and a half ago, I took a long pause from writing because my wife, Lydia, was diagnosed with cancer. God orchestrated a miraculous sequence of events and circumstances that allowed her aggressive cancerous tumor to be detected early. The very day when the cancer was diagnosed, God comforted us with the daily devotional text, Daniel 3:19-30. God promised He would be with Lydia and protect her from the fiery furnace of cancer and that no smell of fire would remain. As God fulfilled His promise, Lydia and I experienced the fullness of the church, especially the Koinonia Cross. He carried us with the help, love, and prayers from the family of God throughout the surgery and treatment. Without the love of God and His family, life would be impossible. Truly, God is sovereign and faithful!

## APPENDIX A

### **INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

**Project Title:** Sanctification Through Koinonia Cross Relationships at International Student Ministry, Antioch Baptist Church

**Principal Investigator:** Byungho Han, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Doctor of Ministry Program

#### **PURPOSE**

This is a research study. The purpose of this research study is to study the importance and impact of the Koinonia Cross Model in your relationship with God. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to participate in the study or not. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear.

#### **PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate, your involvement will last 30 minutes for this survey, and in a few weeks, you may be asked to participate in a follow-up survey.

#### **RISKS**

There are no foreseeable risks to participating.

#### **BENEFITS**

The potential personal benefits that may occur as a result of your participation in this study is the improvement in conducting the Koinonia Cross Relationship Model as discipleship program.

#### **COMPENSATION**

You will not be compensated for participating in this research project.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. We ask for no identifying information on the questionnaire, to ensure confidentiality. We may make an audio recording of the interview, but we will immediately transcribe the recording and destroy the audio files. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

#### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. If you participate in the questionnaire but decline to participate in the interview, the questionnaire data will still be used.

## **QUESTIONS**

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Byungho Han, at: josephbhan@gmail.com; 617-899-8365. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Co-Chair of the Institutional Review Board, David A. Currie, at: dcurrie@gordonconwell.edu; 978-646-4176.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

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(Signature of Participant)      (Date)

## **RESEARCHER STATEMENT**

I have discussed the above points with the participant. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

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(Signature of Researcher)      (Date)

**APPENDIX B**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE PART ONE**

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

What is your marital status?

- Married
- Single

What is your country of origin?

- China
- Japan
- Korea
- Others

Which degree did you come to the U.S. to obtain?

- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Ph.D.
- Postdoc
- F2 Visa

What is/was your field of study?

- STEM
- Business
- Liberal Arts
- Art & Music
- Others

What was your religion prior to becoming a Christian?

- Christian
- Buddhist
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Atheist
- Others

How long have you been attending Antioch Baptist Church?

- 1 to 5 years
- 6 to 10 years
- 11 to 15 years
- 16 to 20 years
- 21 to 25 years
- 26+ years

The Koinonia Cross is a core part of Antioch Baptist Church.

- I strongly agree
- I somewhat agree
- I neither agree nor disagree
- I somewhat disagree
- I strongly disagree

The Koinonia Cross is regularly taught in the following:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Sunday Sermons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bible Studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Small Groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
One-on-Ones	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The Koinonia Cross helped me understand and experience the following:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Word of God	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prayer Life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Witnessing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Repentance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relationships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Who influenced you most in each of the categories of your Christian life?

*The answer must be in increments of 10%. Each category must add up to 100%.*

	Spiritual Leaders	Spiritual Peers	Spouse	Sheep	Self	Others
Word of God						
Prayer Life						
Witnessing						
Repentance						
Relationships						

My Koinonia Cross relationships include:

- Leader(s)
- Peer(s)
- Sheep

How often do you evaluate your Koinonia Cross?

- Once every 3 months
- Once every 6 months
- Once a year
- Less than once a year
- Never

I can teach the Koinonia Cross model to others.

- I strongly agree
- I somewhat agree
- I neither agree nor disagree
- I somewhat disagree
- I strongly disagree

My spiritual leader(s) knows me really well.

- I strongly agree
- I somewhat agree
- I neither agree nor disagree
- I somewhat disagree
- I strongly disagree

My spiritual peer(s) knows me really well.

- I strongly agree
- I somewhat agree
- I neither agree nor disagree
- I somewhat disagree
- I strongly disagree

I know my spiritual peer(s) really well.

- I strongly agree
- I somewhat agree
- I neither agree nor disagree
- I somewhat disagree
- I strongly disagree

I know my sheep really well.

- I strongly agree
- I somewhat agree
- I neither agree nor disagree
- I somewhat disagree
- I strongly disagree

Which of the Koinonia Cross relationships is the strongest?

- Spiritual leader(s)
- Spiritual peer(s)
- Sheep

Which of the Koinonia Cross relationships is the weakest?

- Spiritual leader(s)
- Spiritual peer(s)
- Sheep

**APPENDIX C**

**QUESTIONNAIRE PART TWO**

What has influenced you most on how often to evaluate your Koinonia Cross?

Why is the spiritual leader indicated as the most influential relationship among the Koinonia Cross relationships?

Most answered relationships with the spiritual peers and sheep as the weakest among the Koinonia Cross relationships. Regarding the spiritual peers, why do you believe this is the case?

What would you like to do to improve your relationship with the spiritual peers?

Most answered relationships with the spiritual peers and sheep as the weakest among the Koinonia Cross relationships. Regarding the sheep, why do you believe this is the case?

What would you like to do to improve your relationship with the sheep?

**APPENDIX D**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE PART ONE RESPONSES**

What is your gender?

Male	14/25	56%
Female	11/25	44%

What is your marital status?

Married	17/25	68%
Single	8/25	32%

What is your country of origin?

China	22/25	88%
Japan	1/25	4%
Korea	2/25	8%
Others	0	0%

Which degree did you come to the U.S. to obtain?

Bachelor's	0	0%
Master's	8/25	32%
Ph.D.	15/25	60%
Postdoc	1/25	4%
F2 Visa	1/25	4%

What is/was your field of study?

STEM	21/25	84%
Business	1/25	4%
Liberal Arts	1/25	4%
Art & Music	1/25	4%
Others	1/25	4%

What was your religion prior to becoming a Christian?

Christian	1/25	4%
Buddhist	2/25	8%
Muslim	0	0%
Hindu	0	0%
Atheist	20/25	80%
Others	2/25	8%

How long have you been attending Antioch Baptist Church?

1 to 5 years	2/25	8%
6 to 10 years	8/25	32%
11 to 15 years	6/25	24%
16 to 20 years	4/25	16%
21 to 25 years	6/25	24%
26+ years	0	0%

The Koinonia Cross is a core part of Antioch Baptist Church.

I strongly agree	25/25	100%
I somewhat agree	0	0%
I neither agree nor disagree	0	0%
I somewhat disagree	0	0%
I strongly disagree	0	0%

The Koinonia Cross is regularly taught in the following:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Sunday Sermons	15/25	7/25	3/25	0	0
Bible Studies	12/25	9/25	3/25	1/25	0
Small Groups	13/25	8/25	4/25	0	0
One-on-Ones	13/25	10/25	2/25	0	0

The Koinonia Cross helped me understand and experience the following:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Word of God	17/25	7/25	1/25	0	0
Prayer Life	20/25	4/25	0	1/25	0
Witnessing	15/25	7/25	3/25	0	0
Repentance	21/25	3/25	1/25	0	0
Relationships	22/25	3/25	0	0	0

Who influenced you most in each of the categories of your Christian life?

*The answer must be in %, in increments of 10%. Each category must add up to 100%.*

**MARRIED**

	Spiritual Leaders	Spiritual Peers	Spouse	Sheep	Self	Others
Word of God	66%	11%	9%	2%	9%	7%
Prayer Life	59%	14%	14%	5%	11%	3%
Witnessing	55%	18%	13%	6%	11%	5%
Repentance	61%	16%	14%	3%	7%	5%
Relationships	52%	20%	15%	6%	8%	4%
Overall	58%	16%	13%	5%	9%	5%

Who influenced you most in each of the categories of your Christian life?

*The answer must be in %, in increments of 10%. Each category must add up to 100%.*

**SINGLE**

	Spiritual Leaders	Spiritual Peers	Spouse	Sheep	Self	Others
Word of God	75%	11%	0%	2%	11%	5%
Prayer Life	61%	20%	0%	3%	17%	3%
Witnessing	65%	19%	0%	4%	14%	3%
Repentance	73%	16%	0%	3%	9%	3%
Relationships	63%	24%	0%	3%	10%	5%
Overall	67%	18%	0%	3%	12%	4%

My Koinonia Cross relationships include:

Leader(s)	25/25	100%
Peer(s)	25/25	100%
Sheep	22/25	88%

How often do you evaluate your Koinonia Cross?

Once every 3 months	13/25	52%
Once every 6 months	9/25	36%
Once a year	1/25	4%
Less than once a year	2/25	8%
Never	0	0%

I can teach the Koinonia Cross model to others.

I strongly agree	13/25	52%
I somewhat agree	11/25	44%
I neither agree nor disagree	1/25	4%
I somewhat disagree	0	0%
I strongly disagree	0	0%

My spiritual leader(s) knows me really well.

I strongly agree	23/25	92%
I somewhat agree	2/25	8%
I neither agree nor disagree	0	0%
I somewhat disagree	0	0%
I strongly disagree	0	0%

My spiritual peer(s) knows me really well.

I strongly agree	5/25	20%
I somewhat agree	20/25	80%
I neither agree nor disagree	0	0%
I somewhat disagree	0	0%
I strongly disagree	0	0%

I know my spiritual peer(s) really well.

I strongly agree	3/25	12%
I somewhat agree	19/25	76%
I neither agree nor disagree	1/25	4%
I somewhat disagree	2/25	8%
I strongly disagree	0	0%

I know my sheep really well.

I strongly agree	5/22	23%
I somewhat agree	10/22	45%
I neither agree nor disagree	4/22	18%
I somewhat disagree	3/22	14%
I strongly disagree	0	0%

Which of the Koinonia Cross relationships is the strongest?

Spiritual leader(s)	20/22	91%
Spiritual peer(s)	2/22	9%
Sheep	0	0%

Which of the Koinonia Cross relationships is the weakest?

Spiritual leader(s)	0	0%
Spiritual peer(s)	10/22	45%
Sheep	12/22	55%

**APPENDIX E**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE PART TWO RESPONSES**

What has influenced you most on how often to evaluate your Koinonia Cross?

Church teachings	17/22	77%
Leader initiated	2/22	9%
Self initiated	2/22	9%
Examples around me	1/22	5%

Why is the spiritual leader indicated as the most influential relationship among the Koinonia Cross relationships?

Leaders' teaching and knowledge of the Word of God	6/22	27%
Leaders know me and understand my needs	5/22	23%
Leaders help me see my sins	5/22	23%
Leaders are trustworthy	5/22	23%
Leaders love me	1/22	5%

Most answered relationships with the spiritual peers and sheep as the weakest among the Koinonia Cross relationships. Regarding the spiritual peers, why do you believe this is the case?

Low priority	14/22	64%
Relationship challenges	8/22	36%

What would you like to do to improve your relationship with the spiritual peers?

Spend more time together	16/22	73%
Improve personal character	6/22	27%

Most answered relationships with the spiritual peers and sheep as the weakest among the Koinonia Cross relationships. Regarding the sheep, why do you believe this is the case?

Sheep are not responsive	14/22	64%
Lack of personal character	4/22	18%
Low priority	4/22	18%

What would you like to do to improve your relationship with the sheep?

Pray more	12/22	55%
Spend more time together	6/22	27%
Improve personal character	3/22	14%
Seek help from spiritual leaders	1/22	5%

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